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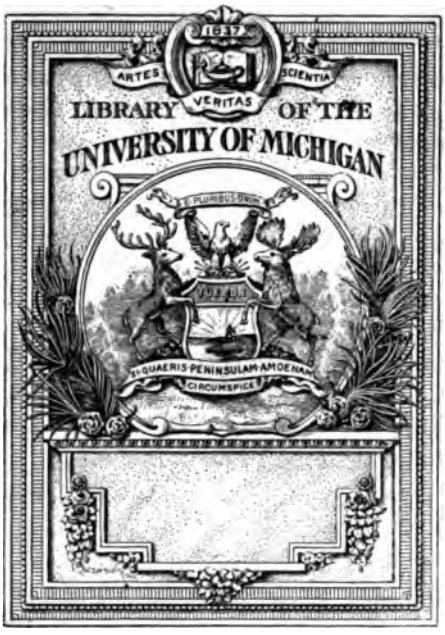
# MR ASQUITH

BY J·P·ALDERSON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MR. ASQUITH

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THE RIGHT HON. H. H. ASQUITH, M.P.

# MR. ASQUITH

J. P. ALDERSON

THE RIGHT HON. H. H. ASQUITH, M.P.

# MR. ASQUITH

BY

J. P. ALDERSON

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

METHUEN & CO.
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MR. ASQUITH AS A BOY, HIS SISTER AND ELDEST BROTHER

FROM AN ORIGINAL WATER-COLOUR DRAWING

# MR. ASQUITH

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY DAYS

HERBERT HENRY ASQUITH was born at Morley on 12th September, 1852. He is the second son of the late Dixon Asquith. His mother's maiden name was Emily Willans, the daughter of William Willans, J.P., of Huddersfield.

The Asquiths are an old Yorkshire family and their descent can be traced back many generations. There is a record to the effect that one named Joseph Asquith took a prominent part in the Farnley Wood Plot of 1664. This was an attempt to re-establish the reign of Puritanism and to revive the conditions of the Commonwealth. The plot failed, and Joseph Asquith and a number of his fellow-townsmen were imprisoned in York Castle. Mr. Asquith is proud of the part his ancestor took in this fight for religious freedom. The Asquiths have since remained staunch Nonconformists.

Mr. Dixon Asquith's father was the founder of the Gillroyd Mill Company, an old Yorkshire firm. The Croft House, where the subject of this biography was born, is an old-fashioned structure and an object of much historic interest. The future Home Secretary was not destined to reside for long in the busy Yorkshire town, but its inhabitants are proud of the fact that the great Liberal statesman was born in their midst. When their new Town Hall was built in 1895, there was a unanimous desire that Mr. Asquith should perform the opening ceremony, and the reception which was accorded him

revealed the great esteem in which he was held by the people of his native town.

The close of the Crimean War was the occasion of popular rejoicing in Morley as elsewhere, and one of Mr. Asquith's earliest recollections is of carrying a flag in a Sunday School procession and singing patriotic songs. At the age of eight he suffered a great misfortune by the death of his father. Shortly afterwards he commenced his education at the Moravian Boarding School. He remained there two years and then he entered the City of London School. This may be recorded as the first landmark in his career. Next to the training of his parents it has proved the most important of the factors that have contributed to his success.

He was rather a serious minded youth but he had high aspirations, and from the moment he entered his new school he bent his energies and abilities with a will to the acquisition of knowledge. Learning, indeed, had more attraction for him than sport or any kind of recreation. To have the privilege of reading a copy of *The Times* at a local bookseller's appears to have had a far greater fascination for him than playing at football or cricket.

He took an exceptionally keen interest in the debates at the local Y.M.C.A., and on one occasion made an able and spirited defence of Dickens's works. Even at that time, Dr. Abbott, his old tutor at the school, informs us, he was a decided Liberal, with, however, an antipathy to women's suffrage. Speaking of his reminiscences, Dr. Abbott once said: "Young Asquith impressed me as a pupil of remarkable promise. In those days the Fifth Form used to learn writing and book-keeping. And, bearing in mind my own experiences as a Fifth Form boy in the writing-room, where fruitless efforts were made to improve my handwriting, and initiate me into the mysteries of book-keeping, I had great pleasure in inviting Mr. Asquith from those studies into the Sixth Class room, where I might give him an occasional five or six minutes of extra supervision in his classical work. I am afraid

that is about the only good thing I did for him, because, as to the rest, he did everything for himself. There was nothing left but to place before him the opportunities of self-education and self-improvement; simply to put the ladder before him, and up he went. It is said that some men are born to greatness, and some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them, but Mr. Asquith appears to me not only to have achieved greatness, but also to have been born with those faculties which could not fail to achieve it. I will not dwell on the very great assistance which, as Captain of the School, he gave me in keeping up the tone, as well as the intellectual standard of the higher classes. But I would gladly say this about him, that in all his studies he showed a thoroughness that commanded my respect and admiration. And I remember him more especially in the School Debating Society as one, who besides having decided opinions on most subjects, appeared to have taken the greatest pains to ascertain the facts that were the basis of his opinions; and also as one of the few, the very few, who could plunge into an intricate and involved sentence with such an artistic prescience of what he had to say, that all the members of the period fell, as it were, into harmonious co-operation, so that in the end he brought his hearers to a full and satisfactory, a logically and rhetorically complete and weighty conclusion, without any sacrifice of point, force, and, above all, of clearness."

At a banquet held in his honour by the members of the John Carpenter Club, on his appointment as Home Secretary, Mr. Asquith dipped into the past and related some interesting incidents of his school days.

"It is, I believe, nearly thirty years since I first entered the school, and I was thinking, as I came down here to-night, that of the masters who taught me during the six years that I spent there, there is not one who now remains at his post. Gentlemen, you will not think it egotistic in me if I recall their names, because there is hardly one the mention of which will not evoke a responsive memory in some guest at one of these tables. I began under Wood-

roffe, a robust, manly, stimulating teacher, from whom I learned, I think I may say, one thing which has not been without its uses to me in after life—I mean the habit of articulate enunciation. I went on from him to Braddy —a most painstaking, accurate and methodical mind. It was from no fault of his that I failed then, as I have failed ever since, to grapple with the elements of mathematics. Well, gentlemen, then came the turn of our friend Mr. Harris, whom we all, I am certain, delight to see among us to-night looking, so far as my eyes can be trusted, younger than ever I saw him. *Cruda viro viridisque senectus.* Well, what shall I say of him? I venture to say that he is a man who does not need to be described to those who know him—whom no description could adequately describe to those who know him not. I passed on, as I am sure many of you did, to Mr. Vardy, a scholar and a gentleman, if ever there was one, who was, as I have often thought, too soon removed to another and to a wider sphere. From him I went to Cuthbertson, the most modest and the most unpretending of mankind, who, as it often seemed to me, took as much trouble to hide as most men to display the gifts and graces of a singularly rare character. And then last of all, I came to Dr. Abbott, who, to me, and I am certain to many of those whom I address to-night, meant, and will always mean, the City School. I will not trust myself to say, for I could not easily find words which would do justice to what I intend and feel, all that I owe to him. I am certain—and I say it deliberately and with full conviction—that there is no man now living to whom I lie under the same debt of obligation.

"Well, gentlemen, I have given you a list of men whom we most of us knew, to whom all of us owe something, and some of us a great deal. And I believe I am correct in saying that not one of them is now in active work in the City of London School. It is a curious thing to account for the persistent individuality which you find in the continuous corporate life of a great institution like a school. Men and boys come and go; generation succeeds

generation; buildings, the outward and bodily environment of the life of a school, may be demolished; it may transfer the scene of its activity to another and a distant site; yet somehow there is a peculiarity in the atmosphere which clings to it in all changes, both from within and without. It is that quality, gentlemen, which is the life of a great school; the *articulus stantis aut cadentis scholae.* But what was it that we, in the City of London School, used to recognise as being the peculiar and the distinctive property of the training which we received, and by virtue of which we all feel here to-night, that we are bound together with a bond of comradeship and of unity which we cannot share with the outside world? In some respects we cannot compare with some of the great schools of the country. We were very slenderly equipped. Although an ancient foundation, the City School, as a school, has only existed, as we have been reminded, since the reign of the Queen. We had no ancient traditions to rest upon outside the academic world. We had hardly any memories of great men which we could appropriate to ourselves. And I think I can say, without giving offence to any one, now that they are demolished, our buildings were contracted, gloomy, and a trifle squalid. We had not that which is regarded by most people, not so much as an accident, but as the very essence of a public school; we had not so much as a playground. (Cries of 'The Horseshoe'.) Well, there is an excellent legal maxim which, I think, is appropriate to the case: '*De minimis non curat lex*'. Gentlemen, instead of those spacious and attractive surroundings, under which the life of most public schools is carried on, we spent our days within the sound, not only of Bow bells, but of the roar and the traffic of Cheapside itself. All those are regarded, I suppose, or would be regarded by an outside critic, as drawbacks and as disadvantages. But I am not at all sure that there is not a good deal to be said upon the other side of the account; that there are not some things which we enjoyed, and by which we benefited, but which were not within the reach of our contemporaries at Winchester and at Eton. I

remember, many years ago now, when Manchester Grammar School, and the City of London School, were winning scholarships at Oxford and at Cambridge, and were rather throwing the old foundations of the country into the shade, that an article was written by a very eminent schoolmaster of that day, the present Dean of Westminster, Dr. Bradley, in which he endeavoured to account for this somewhat disquieting phenomenon. The explanation which he gave, and which had in it an element, and possibly more than an element, of truth, was this: that we, the town-bred and the town-educated boys, brought into contact, as we were every day of our lives, with the sights and the sounds and the life of a great city, brought into our reading an element which could not be contributed from elsewhere—mixed our knowledge, if I may use the expression, with actuality and reality; and thereby, when we came into close competition with those who had spent their life in the sequestered seclusions of the great public schools of the country, we were better equipped for the fray, and could render, perhaps, better account of such resources as we possessed. Gentlemen, I believe there is a great deal of truth in that view of the matter. For my part, when I look back upon my old school life, I think not only, and, perhaps, not so much of the hours which I spent in the classroom, or in preparing the lessons at night; I think, rather, of the daily walk through the crowded, noisy, jostling streets; I think of the river with its barges and its steamers, and its manifold, active life; I think of St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, and of the National Gallery; I think even, sometimes, of the Houses of Parliament where, I remember, we used occasionally to watch, with a sense of awestruck solemnity, the members disappearing into the inner recesses, which we were not allowed to cross, there to discharge the high and mysterious functions which their constituents had imposed upon them.

"Gentlemen, these may have been, perhaps, the illusions of youth; but I am certain there is not one among you who won't agree with me when I say that the presence

and the contact of this stimulating environment contributed a large, ay, and a most influential element to our education in our youth. Well, I do not profess to pronounce any opinion between the two systems. Each has its merits; each has its limitations. Both have this in common. They bring out some of those qualities, intellectual and moral, which are latent in the English character, and which, developed as they are, whether in a school in a town, or in one of the ancient foundations of the country, by co-operation, and by a combined school life, have given to the English people a power which has made them, throughout the length and breadth of the civilised world, the pioneers of civilisation and the leaders of mankind. Gentlemen, I cannot sit down without thanking you once again, and I wish I could find words which would adequately convey the feelings of gratitude of which I am conscious, for the signal honour which you have done me personally to-night. For myself, I feel it is unmerited, but I cannot regret that you have seen fit to make this the occasion, and myself the pretext, of a gathering so representative and so harmonious; of men, each of whom in his own walk in life, when he comes to interrogate his own inner self, must be constrained to confess that he owes the best, the highest and most stimulating influences which guide and which inspire him, to the training which we one and all received at the old City of London School."

When his term at the City of London School was nearing its end, young Asquith achieved a notable triumph. He won the Balliol Scholarship. His schoolfellows and teachers were naturally delighted at the honour reflected on the school by the achievement, and the event was celebrated with the greatest enthusiasm, as previously no boy belonging to the school had gained this coveted distinction. Mr. Asquith himself has said that he looks back upon this youthful success as one of the very happiest moments of his life.

In his speech at the John Carpenter banquet before referred to, he alluded to the incident as follows:—

"I sometimes reflect upon what has been in my life,

as I dare say all of us do at times, the happiest, the most stimulating, and the most satisfactory moment. And I have no doubt whatsoever, when I appraise and compare with one another the different experiences which I have had, the moment which, if I had to choose, I would rather live through again, was the moment when I was able to send to my old Headmaster of the City of London School the news that, for the first time in its history, one of its pupils had won the Balliol Scholarship. Gentlemen, we may have what are called successes in after life, but there are always compensating circumstances which take away from their glamour and their pleasure, and which, perhaps, an inexperienced spectator might ignore. But, when you are seventeen, when you have no cares, when you have no fears about the future, when you have no compromising past to rise up in judgment against you, the attainment of success is a pure, an unalloyed, an unmitigated satisfaction."

Fired with his success, and recognising that the shaping of his future lay in his own hands, the young student made the best of his opportunities, and put to fruitful use the educational advantages he had won. So complete was the success of his efforts that he literally carried all before him. "Asquith Year" is a notable one in the annals of Balliol College, and few undergraduates have brought greater honour to their *Alma Mater* than the ex-Home Secretary.

One of these, however, is his own son, Mr. Raymond Asquith, whose remarkable "honours list" eclipses even that of his great sire. Emulating the inspiring example set him he carried off the Balliol Scholarship, and since then he has won the Derby, Craven, Ireland and the Eldon Law Scholarships, in addition to three "Firsts" and a Fellowship of All Souls. His phenomenal successes have naturally given great gratification to his parents. He has also followed in his father's footsteps by taking a very active interest in the "Union" at Oxford, and he promises to develop into as stalwart a protagonist of the Liberal faith as the ex-Home Secretary. It is interesting to note that Mr. Asquith holds a record in connection with the

"Union" as the only President who has been succeeded in that office by two sons.

The following very interesting reminiscences of Mr. Asquith's career at school have been very kindly supplied to me for the purpose of this biography by his old tutor and headmaster, Dr. Abbott.

"My earliest recollections of Mr. Asquith recall him as a bright boy of thirteen or fourteen, somewhere about 1866, a year after I had become Headmaster of the City of London School, when he was entering the Fifth Form and liable (under the then existing regulations which I had not yet altered) to spend two hours a week at 'writing and book-keeping'. Thinking he could spend his time better I invited him to sit in the room where I was writing letters, and to try his hand at Greek iambics with such aid as I could give him in odd minutes. He made rapid progress in classics, and also distinguished himself in English literature which I had just introduced into the school curriculum. Entering the Sixth Form he rose rapidly to the top and gained the first Balliol Scholarship obtained by a City of London School boy.

"But it was in the Sixth Form Debating Society that he most impressed me. I used to sit with the boys, as president, after school hours while they debated: and as the presidential duties were nominal, and time was precious, I used to continue correcting exercises, and endeavouring, mostly with success, to restrict my attention to the debates within such limits as not to interfere with my work. But when Asquith entered the society I began to find this difficult. As he developed it became more difficult, and finally, whenever he entered the lists of orators I resigned myself to a willing attention, and was content to take my exercises away with me uncorrected.

"As to the qualities in his speaking that made me listen, I think they were much the same as make men listen to him now, and not only listen but read; and as I do not wish to eulogise but to state facts not generally known, I say no more about them. For the same reason I refrain from describing the 'habits and hobbies' of my former

pupil. 'Hobbies' I should say he had not: his haoits, I will merely say, were of the right sort. If he had joined that vast majority concerning whom we are warned to say, *nil nisi bonum*, I could have written you a good deal that was not only *bonum* but *verum*. But I trust he will so long survive me that I shall never be in a position to do this.

"One thing, however, I may say because I remember saying it at a public dinner some ten years ago when the School Club congratulated him on his Home Secretaryship —that, from his boyhood upward he knew what he meant and knew how to say what he meant: and I will add that he always seemed to me to have a right to speak his mind freely, because he had taken so much pains, and used so much judgment, good sense and patient thought and study in making up his mind.

"At the same dinner I recollect that Asquith spoke in what seemed to me hyperbolic terms of the debt he owed to me as his headmaster. I was a little puzzled, because I am sure he would not knowingly deal in hyperbole. But in reflection I explained it by my general experience that a boy's or man's appreciation of his debt to his old schoolmaster or school sometimes varies inversely with the amount of the debt and directly with the amount of his modesty. So I will say now—what I had no opportunity of replying then—that I never had a pupil who owed less to me and more to his own natural ability."

## CHAPTER II

### UNIVERSITY CAREER—PART I

IN this chapter and the next, Mr. T. Herbert Warren, the President of Magdalen College, Oxford, has kindly recorded some reminiscences of Mr. Asquith's Oxford days.

"I first heard Mr. Asquith's name in the autumn of 1869. I was then a boy in the Sixth Form at Clifton College. There was great excitement among us when one of our number, Mr. E. N. P. Moor, the Head of the School, gained one of the two annual Balliol Scholarships, it being the first time this distinction had been achieved for the school, and we were naturally interested to know who had won the other. The knowledge reached us that it was a Mr. Asquith, and that he was only seventeen years of age, which made his performance even more than usually brilliant.

"Elected thus, Asquith began his residence at Balliol in the autumn term of the next year, 1870. The time was a notable one in the history of the College. Its general prestige and that of its scholars stood high at the moment, higher possibly, if only by accumulation, than it had ever previously done, though there had been many brilliant groups and periods since the era somewhere about 1820 when the scholarships had first been thrown open and the College entered on its modern history. Mr. Jowett, himself a member of one of the first of these groups, and since then a most distinguished tutor, had a few weeks before succeeded to the Mastership, and as may be read in his *Life*, was full of ideas and of reforming energy, determined

to show what he could do as Head, having done so much for the College in a subordinate position. Among the tutors were two men of the very first order of originality, ability and devotion, Professor Henry Smith and Mr., afterwards Professor T. H. Green; others were also eminent. All were men of decided capacity, and more than one of those under whose tutorship Asquith in due course more especially came, such as Mr., now Baron de Paravicini, and Mr., now Professor Case, President of Corpus, were particularly good teachers.

"The College was strong too in its junior members. At the scholars' table Asquith's immediate predecessors were Alfred Goodwin, afterwards Professor of Latin at University College, London, and F. H. Peters, afterwards Fellow and Tutor of University College, Oxford; W. M. Sinclair, now Archdeacon of London; A. H. Higgs, a man of marked original power; R. H. Roe, now Headmaster of Brisbane School, and W. H. Forbes, one of the best classicists Eton has ever sent to Oxford; his exact contemporary and brother scholar was Mr. E. N. P. Moor, already mentioned, a pupil and afterwards a Master at Clifton College, a most graceful and poetic mind and a singularly winning personality, alas too early taken from us. A year junior to him were Charles Gore, now Bishop of Birmingham, and Philip Lyttelton-Gell, while two years junior came my own year with M. G. Glazebrook, now Canon of Bristol and Headmaster of Clifton College; H. W. Watkins, now Archdeacon of Durham; L. Fletcher, now F.R.S. and Keeper of the Minerals in the British Museum; and a few months later still Alfred Milner, now known to all the world as Viscount Milner.

"Among his general contemporaries, some a little older, some younger, were the Earl of Elgin and the Marquis of Tavistock, Professors Cook-Wilson, Edgeworth, Andrew Bradley, Sweet, Richard Lodge, J. McCunn, and Charles Vaughan; philanthropists like C. S. Loch, Arnold Toynbee and Leonard Montefiore; at least nine subsequent members of Parliament, R. G. C. Mowbray, now Sir Robert Mowbray, C. A. Whitmore, C. B. Stuart-Wortley, Henry

Hobhouse, Alexander, now Sir Alexander, Acland-Hood, Henry, now Sir Henry, Seymour King, H. E. Hoare, C. Lacaita, and George, afterwards Sir George, Baden-Powell; among men afterwards to achieve literary or scholastic distinction were Churton Collins, Rowland Prothero, W. H. Mallock, Julian Sturgis, J. E. C. Bodley, H. W. Rawnsley, now Canon Rawnsley, J. W. Flanagan and C. P. Lucas, well known both as a public servant in the Colonial Office and as the historian of the Colonies; W. G. Rutherford, till the other day Headmaster of Westminster School; A. L. Smith, Fellow and Tutor of Balliol at this present moment and one of the best teachers of history in the University. Eustace Corbett, of the Egyptian Judiciary, D. Dundas, Solicitor General for Scotland, and Cecil Chapman, the London police magistrate, may also be mentioned as belonging to this epoch.

"The College stood high in the schools, and aided by such famous oars as Dr. Darbishire and Mr., now Sir John, Edwards-Moss, high on the river too. It contributed to the Union at least half of the most prominent speakers in that society. Above all it was animated by a strenuous, confident and ambitious spirit. It contained of course different sets, but these were not exclusive; it was not difficult to pass from one to the other, or to belong to more than one at the same time, and in particular, the division into years, at all times a marked feature of Cambridge, was then, owing to the overlapping of examinations, far less noticeable at Oxford than it has since become. The College too was much smaller than it is now—though how we all managed to squeeze into the old hall even then, I often wonder—and in consequence it was both a very clubbable and a very educative community where the contact and collision of wits and tastes, of bents and ambitions, exercised a most stimulating influence.

"Asquith came up from the training of Dr. Abbott, a strong classical scholar, with, what is more, a living interest in literature both ancient and modern. He missed, it is true, some of the great prizes for undergraduate scholarship, such as the 'Hertford,' and the most distinguished of all,

the 'Ireland,' but he came very near winning them. In 1872 he was *proxime accessit* for the 'Hertford,' in 1873 he was honourably mentioned for the 'Ireland,' and in 1874 he all but won that scholarship. I remember hearing him after they had both gone down say to Milner, who also just missed the Ireland, 'We have both of us known what it is to "approximate"'. The examiners, among whom were the present eminent Professor of Latin, Mr. Robinson Ellis and his predecessor, Mr. Henry Nettleship, were divided; only after a long discussion did they determine to give the scholarship to another gifted scholar of Balliol, Mr. H. F. Tatum, and what is very rarely done, to award a special prize of books to Asquith. It was said, I remember, that if Asquith had only sent up a copy of elegiacs, which he had all but finished, in their unfinished condition, it would have turned the scale. By an interesting coincidence, one of the very same examiners who took part in this decision was again examining in 1899, and had the pleasure of awarding to Mr. Raymond Asquith the scholarship which he had not seen his way to award to his father. This was Mr. Evelyn Abbott, Fellow and Tutor of Balliol, since alas deceased.

"I had first heard of Asquith as I have already said when he won the scholarship along with Moor, already mentioned, who was a schoolfellow of mine at Clifton. Three years later I went up myself to Balliol. He was then living with his brother in a set of rooms often used for brothers, at the top of one of the staircases in the 'Garden' quadrangle. The next occupants were, if I remember rightly, George Baden-Powell (poor fellow!) already mentioned, and his brother Frank. Though two years his junior, partly through friends of intervening standing, still more I think through common interest in scholarship and through the Union, I soon came, I hardly recollect how, to know him well. There grew up indeed by degrees a special set of which he was in a sense the hero and centre, christened I believe by outsiders 'the Clique,' although, as I have indicated before, when speaking generally of the Balliol sets, it was certainly not an exclu-

sive coterie. Asquith had many friends outside it, so had every member of it. It met often at the rooms of one or other of its members; on Saturday evenings for whist, to which Asquith was devoted—these were the 'præpontine' days—on Sunday mornings for breakfast, on many an afternoon for tea at the Union. The members were, as far as I remember, in Balliol—Asquith himself and his brother, W. W. Asquith, now an assistant master at Clifton, a man of marked ability, a ready writer and a strikingly ready speaker, not so incisive but with some notes in his compass which even H. H. did not possess; T. Raleigh later Fellow of All Souls, member of the Indian Council and Sir T. Raleigh, a man of great geniality and capacity, often in those days, it is true, singularly silent but an admirable talker when he chose and also an excellent speaker; F. P. Simpson, an ingenious, not to say adroit scholar, of much repute and indeed distinguished by a special sobriquet among us for his fertility and artifice in the intellectual races for which we were so often entering; A. R. Cluer, a schoolfellow of mine at Clifton, also an excellent classical scholar whose ability, integrity and resource Asquith in later days, when he was Home Secretary, did not forget and who is now a Metropolitan Police Magistrate of no little note; Joseph Solomon, one of the most versatile minds I have ever met—mathematician, musician, philosopher, historian, scholar; James Forrest, heir to a Scotch baronetcy, which he enjoyed for too brief a period; and out of college, Henry Broadbent, of Exeter, now of Eton, perhaps the most learned classicist of our company; H. W. Paul, of Corpus, the well-known writer and sometime M.P. for Edinburgh; T. C. Snow, of Corpus, since Fellow of St. John's, a great philologist and an omnivorous reader, and W. E. Russell of the same college, afterwards an assistant master at Haileybury College.

"I, at least, have always felt that I owed a very large debt to this society. Some of us perhaps were drawn to a certain extent by its dominating influence, which was political and oratorical, into lines which were not altogether ours, and away from what might have been a truer

bent, but of its potent and stimulating influence upon us all I have no doubt. We learned I believe many of us to think more clearly and to express ourselves more readily than we should otherwise have done. One thing is certain, that we were all drawn together by it toward the Union. Of Asquith's connection with that institution, forming as it undoubtedly did one of the most important and interesting sides of his Oxford career and training, it seems natural to speak with some fulness.

"The Union Debating Society at Oxford, like that at Cambridge, and possibly to an even more conspicuous extent, has been undoubtedly one of the most notable schools of public life and oratory in the country. It may be claimed for Asquith and his generation that they did much to enhance its reputation in this regard. But they found it strong. When they came up into residence the Union was already a historic society just on the eve of celebrating its first jubilee. The memories of its great founders, Bishop Durnford and Lord Winmarleigh, and their successors, the 'Uniomachiai,' the battles of 'Bob Lowe,' of University, with Archibald Campbell Tait, of Balliol, the reputations of Cardinal Manning, Mr. Gladstone and Sir Thomas Acland, and Lords Selborne and Cardwell and their compeers, and later of Lord Salisbury and Lord Goschen, still lingering in mens' memories, were brought again with fresh vividness before a younger generation when so many of these illustrious men returned to the scene of their early exploits on the occasion of the great banquet held in honour of this occasion in October, 1873.

"There was a nearer era of demi-gods, if not of divinities, that of Lord Justice Bowen and Professors Dicey and Bryce and T. H. Green, while the generation again which had just passed away and gone out into the world, if less distinguished by conspicuous names, had well maintained the old tradition on the old lines.

"And those actually in possession in 1870 were well worthy of the reputation of the house. Among the more conspicuous officers and speakers, a little senior or

junior, or just contemporary with Mr. Asquith, were Mr. Copleston, of St. John's, now Bishop of Calcutta; Mr. MacClymont, of Balliol, and Mr. Swift MacNeill, of Christ Church, typical examples respectively of the canny Scotch and fiery Irish genius; Mr. Cotton, of Trinity, and Mr. Gould of the same College, a man of much political and debating promise, who, as we thought then, and as I still think, with his genuine adroitness and imperturbable *sangfroid*, played no unworthy Disraeli to Asquith's Gladstone; Mr. F. A. Hyndman, of St. John's, subsequently the well-known Socialist leader, Mr. H. P. Richards, then of Balliol, since of Wadham, a singularly lucid, logical and courageous speaker, who because he introduced a motion in favour of the restoration of the Republic in France was by the lively and creative undergraduate imagination supposed quite gratuitously to have stood, or at any rate to be ready to stand, on a barricade in Paris; Mr. H. A. James, of St. John's, now Headmaster of Rugby; Mr. Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, a man of fashion at Christ Church, who led a sort of young England party; Mr. H. W. Paul, of Corpus, already a master of oratorical epigram and pungent criticism, and a Balliol trio, Asquith's own brother, Mr. W. W. Asquith, his great friend Mr. T. Raleigh, already described, and, somewhat later, Mr. Alfred Milner. Other speakers prominent in the debates of these times were Mr. A. Milnes, of Lincoln, Mr. W. S. Shirley, of Balliol, and Mr. C. A. V. Conybeare, of Christ Church, afterwards well known to the House of Commons as member for Camborne.

"Mr. Gladstone's Government was at this time (1870) in the heyday of its reforming activity although, or perhaps for this very reason, signs of what was called a Conservative reaction were not wanting. The same state of things was reflected in the mimic Parliament at Oxford. Both parties were strong. The preponderance in voting was as a rule Conservative, that in speaking Liberal. Party lines were clear and views were decided and pronounced. Sweeping motions couched in trenchant terms were brought forward, supported and opposed, debates were adjourned,

amendments were prepared and withdrawn, members rose to order, officers were impeached, brawlers were fined, polls were demanded, elections were impugned. 'Scenes' occurred which taxed to the full the nerve and resource of the President and his committees. Private business brought the Treasurer on his feet and the house was divided over the number of copies of the *Rock* and the *Record* supplied to the reading-room, or the nail-brushes not supplied to the lavatory, while the Librarian's life was made a burden because he had or had not ordered from the circulating library copies of the latest novel by Miss Broughton.

"In one of these the future Metropolitan of India, Mr. Copleston, was arraigned for climbing through a window by night to put up a notice which ought to have been put up by day, and in turn fined the Treasurer, who tore it down as illegal.

"In another Mr. Cotton ended theatrically a great career as a debater by vowing that he could never again cross the threshold of the debating-room. 'From these scenes I vanish for ever,' he cried, and then pointing to Asquith added,

'Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor,'

and immediately ran round to the gallery to see what would be the sequel of his self-imposed banishment.

"I myself remember such a scene, when after a long wrangle over the ruling of the President, one of our party roused us to a high pitch of excitement by saying, 'If these things are permitted the liberties of this House are for ever lost'. This was Mr. Edwin Harrison, of Balliol, whom many of that period will remember as perhaps the most promising intellect of his Oxford generation, eclipsed, alas! too early by premature decline and death.

"An assembly at once aristocratic and democratic, and in both respects highly critical and demonstrative, the Union audience is inclined to be merciless with the mercilessness of infallible youth. The man who can face it

when it is in a hostile, or engage it when it is in a fastidious mood, can face or engage any audience anywhere.

"In such an arena Asquith was eminently suited to succeed. Cool and courageous, intellectually alert, well informed, sure of himself, with a voice clear and sufficiently strong and flexible, if not specially powerful, and a striking command of apt and incisive language, he was ready for any emergency. He had the advantage, too, more easily enjoyed perhaps in those days than later on, of being a thoroughgoing party man. He did not conciliate, perhaps he seemed sometimes to make too little effort to conciliate, opponents, but neither friend nor foe could fail to listen to him, and even the latter listened with intellectual enjoyment. Oxford, moreover, is small enough for a marked man very rapidly to acquire a personal reputation on general grounds, and his recognised intellectual eminence went far to give weight to and adorn his business capacity in office, and his ready resource in debate.

"He lost no time in making himself felt. He delivered his maiden speech when he had been barely a month in residence, on the time-honoured subject of the Retention of the Bishops in the House of Lords, which it is hardly necessary to say he opposed. Only a fortnight later, still a junior freshman, he took the place of an absent leader and moved a resolution—'That in the reorganisation of the English army the principle of compulsion ought to be introduced'. The next term found him introducing a motion of his own—'That this House, while sympathising deeply with the sufferings and heroic resistance of France (it was the awful winter of 1870), is of opinion that non-intervention on her behalf was the only wise and dignified course for England'. In the summer term he had already made sufficient mark to be chosen by the President, Mr. H. A. James, now Headmaster of Rugby, one of his Standing Committee, and he now moved a characteristic motion—'That in the opinion of this House it is desirable that the existing connection between Church and State in this country should cease'.

"He continued to speak often and well, and a year later, in the spring of 1872, was elected Treasurer. This office was even more important then than it has become in later years since the appointment of a Permanent Senior Treasurer. A perusal of the Treasurer's Suggestion-book for this period shows the questions with which Asquith had to deal and the mode in which he handled them. He signalised his tenure of office by one permanent and most beneficial reform, the introduction of smoking and of afternoon tea, then a somewhat novel institution in Oxford and indeed in the country, into the Union.

"Obvious boons as these were, they were not conferred without much criticism and opposition. The Treasurer himself was one of the foremost in demonstrating their utility. A steady smoker and a great reader himself, he used to advise his friends to spend one hour every afternoon in general reading in the Union.

"Somewhat later, almost any day in the winter and many days in the summer too, he might be seen, the centre of the set of friends already alluded to, the merry 'Clique,' smoking or playing chess, or reading, but whichever he was doing, always ready to discuss, and to do battle with any challenger, whether in the rapid thrust and parry of passing repartee, or in a more serious and prolonged encounter.

"These were indeed delightful and formative hours. It is in such hours, that looking back we see, or seem to see, for they wear a halo in memory, much of the most potent educational influence of a great resident University, to have been focussed, hours—

> When each by turns was guide to each,
> And Fancy light from Fancy caught,
> And Thought leapt out to wed with Thought
> Ere Thought could wed itself with Speech.
>
> And all we met was fair and good,
> And all was good that time could bring,
> And all the secret of the Spring
> Moved in the chambers of the blood."

## CHAPTER III

### UNIVERSITY CAREER—PART II

"TO return however to Asquith's more definite Union career. In November, 1872, we find him moving a motion which he carried by two votes—'That the disintegration of the Empire is the true solution of the Colonial difficulty'. Next year his period of office as Treasurer expired and he put up as a candidate for the office of President. His opponent was Mr. Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, of Christ Church, already mentioned.

"Mr. Bartlett was said in the language of the Balliol undergraduates of the time to have 'feasted the citizens at more than sixteen sesterces a head'. He had certainly cultivated the constituency by various arts, and was personally popular and agreeable and a showy and by no means ineffective speaker, if not of the most commanding order. There was a great contest. Mr. Bartlett obtained a large majority. The Conservative reaction triumphed earlier in the Union than in St. Stephen's. He was succeeded by Mr. Mowbray and he again by Mr. Gould, and it was a full year before Asquith obtained the coveted position which he so well deserved, that of the first officer of the society.

"It is worthy of note that as President he nominated for his Secretary a young Canadian full of enthusiasm and with much natural gift for oratory who had just come for a year or two to Oxford as a 'Non-collegiate student,' and who had stepped at once into the first rank of Union speakers. This was Mr. G. R. Parkin, now C.M.G., and Secretary to the Rhodes Trustees. A debate set on foot

by this gentleman was the chief feature of Mr. Asquith's term of office.

"On 7th May, 1874, Mr. Parkin moved—'That in the opinion of this House, a closer union than at present exists between England and her Colonies is essential to the highest future prosperity of both, and should as soon as possible be effected by such an Imperial Federation as will secure the representation of the more important Colonies in the Imperial Councils'.

"The debate proved a most interesting one. It was adjourned on the motion of Mr. Alfred Milner, who subsequently supported it warmly, aided by Mr. Hyndman, of St. John's, Mr. Lyttelton-Gell and Mr. Iwan-Müller. Asquith as President supported the adjournment, but spoke against the motion.

"It was this debate, as Mr. Parkin has often related, which led to his warm and lifelong friendship with Milner, nor is it extravagant to find in it one of the earliest if not the original promulgation of the great doctrine of Colonial Imperialism, which in the hands of both Unionists and Liberal Imperialists has played and is destined to play so important a part in the present and future of the English race and indeed of the world.

"The end of Asquith's Union career coincided with that of his undergraduate days, and both wound up with high and brilliant success. In this same summer term he took a First Class in the Final Classical Schools and a few weeks later won the Craven Fellowship, being bracketed as equal with his old friend and rival, Mr. Henry Broadbent.

"In the autumn of the same year he won a yet higher and more substantial distinction, a Fellowship at his own College, Balliol, along with Mr. Andrew Cecil Bradley, since Professor of English Literature at Liverpool and at Glasgow, and now Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

"Both men had the highest reputation among those of their undergraduate compeers best qualified to judge, but in very different ways—Bradley as a philosopher and English essayist, Asquith as a classical scholar, and still more as a man of commanding intellectual force in the

practical field, and certain to come to the front in the great world. There were other candidates of high promise in scholarship and research, but to these I am afraid we paid less attention than I have since come to see they deserved.

"I belonged to the circle of Asquith, and I well remember our anxiety when it was rumoured that there was a chance that he might not be elected. We had, however, great confidence in the judgment and omnipotence of the Master, Mr. Jowett. We felt sure Asquith was a man after his own heart. Nor were we, as I have since had reason to believe, far wrong. Indeed, I remember once when I was an undergraduate talking to the Master about Asquith and telling him how certain we his friends all were that he would get on and be a great man and asking him somewhat eagerly if he did not agree, feeling sure that he would, though prepared with trembling to differ if he did not. 'Yes,' he said, 'Asquith will get on. He is so direct.' This exactly expressed one of his main characteristics. Whatever his objective, he always went straight for it.

"Some of us at any rate applied to him two lines written some forty years before, about Mr. Gladstone, and said :—

> 'See Asquith soon in Senates to be first,
> If age shall ripen what his youth rehearsed.'

"Confident youth, fortunately, does not as a rule realise the difficulties which lie between it and great achievement. The contingent matter of life, health, money, marriage, the advantages of others, the importance of opportunity, of experience, the little things that at a critical moment turn the scale, or deflect the path, these are factors the undergraduate cannot rightly assess. He reckons by undergraduate achievement and still more by that undefined impression of eminent capacity and natural ascendency of which he is keenly, if somewhat vaguely, sensible. Only in after days, the discipline and experience of life's journey teach him the just proportion, when—

> Long the way appears, which seem'd so short
> To the less practised eye of sanguine youth.

"One of our number, it is true, I remember, more sagacious or more cynical than the rest, in a despondent moment suggested that a certain eldest son of a noble house, since deceased, unknown either to the Union or the schools, was more likely to be the future Prime Minister of our generation than either Asquith or Milner. We put the idea away with prompt scorn, the more so as we thought the entire abolition of the House of Lords only a question of a year or two.

"It was characteristic of Asquith himself that he took a very just estimate of the world, and of his own possibilities. He never hesitated as to his own line, never for a moment thought of staying in Oxford, but began to read in chambers, married early, and gave himself at once to his career.

"Indeed, what struck me most I think about him, and what strikes me still more looking back, was his maturity and sagacity, and his essentially practical genius. One of the younger Balliol dons, a generous dreamer, complained that Asquith's fault was that he would never do a thing at all better than would just suffice, that he had no uncalculating idealism. There may have been some justice in the remark. He certainly knew the value of the French saying, 'The better is the enemy of the good'. But if his idealism was mingled with prudence it was not wanting. He had high aims and generous aims. He was an ardent Liberal of those days, he had no little sympathy with the poor and struggling, and a great belief in freedom, in democracy, in the possibility of a large amelioration of social conditions by legislation, and in the raising of the general level by education. But the things for which we were striving in those days were with him means and not ends. His scholarship and his fellowship were only steps in a path on which he had, even before he came to Oxford, determined to press forward. Critics said that his manner was dry and 'standoffish' and slightly contemptuous. He had not I think then in general society the ready *bonhomie* of which the discipline of success and prosperity has since brought to him a good measure, though to his

friends he was even then delightful company, playful and engaging, with a certain keenness and still more a mobility, which on the other hand, amid the fatigues and cares of life, may have become perhaps a little less striking. They also said he was too cocksure and quoted the well-known epigram on Macaulay. He was certainly sure of himself. He knew what he wanted. Our study in those days lay much in Roman history, and we recognised in Asquith a certain Cæsarian character. We noted, I remember, the coincidence that Asquith's father like Cæsar's had died young. His oratory certainly was of the Cæsarian or Demosthenic rather than the Ciceronian type. It was not wanting in occasional ornament, but his style was of the middle order and inclining to what the ancients called the spare and lean rather than the redundant. In other words he carried no superfluity, he possessed what Quintilian says the orator should possess, not the showy biceps of the gymnast, but the sinewy arms of the soldier.[1]

"He spoke indeed then very much as he does now, and strange as perhaps it may seem, I believe almost as well. He had not of course the same wealth of experience. His voice was less powerful, his air of authority less habitual and obvious. But he had the same *lucidus ordo*, the same apparently natural clearness, both of phrase and of general arrangement.

"He had much power of description and especially of somewhat sarcastic description. I remember in particular his speech on the characteristic motion—'That this House neither believes in, nor desires, the Conservative Reaction'—in which he compared the Conservative Reaction to the 'Bog of Allan' which caused great consternation in the neighbourhood by unaccountably setting itself in motion, and then just when every one had been stirred to activity, and all kinds of precautionary measures were being taken, as unaccountably stopped.

"He was I have said a very distinguished undergraduate scholar. He was not, it is true, profoundly learned, nor

[1] "Non athletarum toros sed militum lacertos."

very widely read, nor had he again that artistic turn and delight in playing with and manipulating language which makes a certain type of scholar. He was more of the orator than the poet. But here again his great force of intellect, his practical bent and sense of the effective served him in good stead.

"His composition, like his oratory, was not characterised by purple patches, but by being well sustained, clear and to the point. He would however often hit on an admirably useful and illuminating phrase, and at all times he had a practical eye for a 'good turn' and in particular for a suggestive metaphor. I remember well hearing him explain, half in jest, to one of his pupils at St. Andrews the merits for a critical piece, of such a phrase as, *Non populari quidem trutina sed aurificis statera*, or again how convenient a certain Greek verb was, as it governed both the accusative and the dative. He was specially strong in Latin prose and Latin elegiacs, and I recollect his tutor showing me, as a model for myself, a masterly rendering by him into Latin of Sir John Cheke's 'Remonstrance with Ket and his Rebels'. I also remember a skilful Latin version by him of 'The Danube to the Severn gave,' from 'In Memoriam'; and as a specimen in a different vein I recall his writing an epigram in the style of Martial on a notorious figure of those days, 'The Claimant,' every line commencing I think with the name 'Orto,' which we considered a particularly ingenious device.

"When I began to read Roman history for the Final School I wanted to take up the Punic Wars as Hannibal was a great hero of mine. 'If I were you' he said, 'I'd stick to the later period. In the Empire you have the growth of a great political conception.'

"I owe to him too, I remember, an introduction in my second term to Matthew Arnold's delightful lectures on translating Homer, then a book little known to undergraduates, because so difficult to come by, and in particular I recalled his pointing out with merry but not ill-natured enjoyment the passage in which that master of banter makes game of Mr. F. W. Newman and the Balliol dons,

'the members,' as he calls them, 'of that distinguished society of whose discourse not so many years afterwards I myself was an unworthy hearer'.

"Some of us—Raleigh, W. W. Asquith, Cluer and others used often in the summer to make up a boat and row down the river. Asquith came once or twice with us, but I fancy mainly as a passenger, though I think I can see him playing quoits and drinking cider-cup at Kennington Island. I think too he was with us once or twice when we went to bathe above Godstow in the last days of the summer term, then, as the poet sings, 'when haytime's there'.

> In June and many a scythe in sunshine flames
> . . . in those wide fields of breezy grass
> Where black-winged swallows haunt the glittering Thames.

And I seem to remember him capping quotations and bandying chaff and criticism with Churton Collins, who was the inspiring genius of such hours and who would stalk the classic meadows quoting with his amazing memory Pindar and Milton and Cowley and many less-known authors not by the yard but by the furlong or the league.

"Asquith was not athletic. He did not play cricket or football or fives or racquets. At St. Andrews he did not at that time give much attention to golf, and I remember we were somewhat astonished when one day he hired a horse and rode over with Nash to see some friends in the neighbourhood. But he enjoyed excellent health and his frame was well compacted and I recollect seeing him floor his man very successfully in a trial of strength, an innocent 'rag' as it would now be called, on a visit to Cambridge when we were all of us rather in high spirits. A very pleasant visit it was. Three of us, Asquith, Simpson and myself, went over for a couple of nights for a little change before the examination for the 'Ireland' Scholarship. Asquith and Simpson stayed in Trinity, I at Christ's. We each of us had our school and other friends. Asquith's I remember were Mr. Cox of Trinity, afterwards Head of Cavendish College, and a most amusing man named Verry,

of Christ's. But we 'pooled' them all, so to speak, and they us, and we had in consequence an embarrassing superfluity of hospitality and a very festive time. I remember in particular a breakfast at which I met Mr. Walter Leaf and Mr. Gerald Balfour, leading undergraduates of that day.

"Another experience was the contested election at Woodstock in 1874, when the Hon. George Brodrick, afterwards Warden of Merton, opposed Lord Randolph Churchill, then only known as a young Merton man of some ability but rather 'noisy' reputation, and a scion of the great house of Marlborough. A lot of us from Balliol, in complete disregard and probably ignorance of the University statutes, drove over to see the fun and if possible to aid the cause of Liberalism. It was then I first saw and heard a very distinguished ex-Oxford Professor, Mr. Goldwin Smith, rendered more famous by a recent satirical travesty in Disraeli's *Lothair*, supposed to apply to him. He spoke in a vein of saturnine sarcasm and sombre vaticination which impressed us very much. Asquith was busy with his Final Schools or Fellowship work, but I think spoke once for Mr. Brodrick. The odd thing was that Lord Randolph Churchill made no attempt to speak at all, and indeed his powers of oratory were quite undreamt of. There was, however, no need of these as the influence of his House was all-potent and he was returned with ease by a sufficient majority.

"After winning his Fellowship Asquith remained in residence for I think about a year, taking pupils and reading somewhat freely. I remember in particular his perusing Gibbon and being much interested in certain ecclesiastical and even doctrinal questions.

"It was in the summer of 1875 that I last saw much of him continuously. A number of us organised a joint reading party on a considerable scale at St. Andrews. Asquith was to take his pupils, the rest of us, who were at different stages in our career, were to read for ourselves, one or two came as friends. The gathering was certainly a remarkable one. It consisted of Asquith himself and

three pupils, R. F. W. Shawe, of University; W. P. Ker, now Professor of English Literature at University College, London and A. J. Ashton, now a successful barrister in good practice; F. P. Simpson, H. W. Paul, J. Solomon, A. Nash, a Trinity and Clifton man, and myself. Raleigh and Forrest came over at different times from Edinburgh with their friends and joined us.

"It was an ideal reading party. We worked all the morning, and often late into the night. In the long afternoons we bathed, or walked, or played golf. The game then was hardly known out of Scotland, and even at St. Andrews in those happy days the links were by no means crowded. We made one or two excursions. I still remember lying in a field between trains at Ladybank Junction, where in those days you seemed to be always waiting between trains, reading Swinburne and disputing with Asquith as to the exact merits of 'Ilicet'. We went on Sundays and sat in the gallery to hear Principal Tulloch. I cannot remember that we heard 'A. K. H. B.,' but I remember that apropos of his well-known book, *Recreations of a Country Parson*, Paul pronounced that he was a master of misnomer, for 'he was not a parson and did not live in the country'. We consumed vast quantities of Scotch viands, especially raspberry tarts, shortbread and whisky and water. The smokers smoked, the whist-players played whist, and one and all we talked as ever, interminably, on all things human and divine.

"These six or seven weeks were a happy wind-up to our Oxford days. Our merry, keen coterie, an innocent mutual admiration society, tempered by much mutual criticism, never met again as a whole even in Oxford. I have been to St. Andrews often since, and shall always love it alike for its own romantic charm and for the association of those unforgettable days. Mr. Asquith is of course well known there and I have often thought what a characteristic introduction this summer reading party formed to the ancient kingdom of Fife, with which he has been now so long and so honourably connected."

## CHAPTER IV

### AN APPRECIATION OF DR. JOWETT. BECOMES A BARRISTER

THE late Professor Jowett, known to all the world as "The Master of Balliol," exercised a great and stimulating influence on Mr. Asquith's early career, and at an influential meeting held in December, 1893, for the purpose of recording a sense of the nation's loss at the famous Master's death, and of raising a memorial fund, Mr. Asquith utilised the opportunity to pay an eloquent tribute to his memory. The late Marquis of Salisbury presided, and after the Lord Chancellor had spoken, Mr. Asquith made his speech.

"I have one claim," he said, "to speak to this resolution which is not shared by either of the noble lords who have addressed us, in the fact that I am an old Balliol man, and like I suppose all Balliol men, I should feel that any tribute to the memory of our late Master was not quite complete if it did not include an expression, however inadequate, of the gratitude and affection of the great College to which the best hours and the best energies of his life were given. It is true, as this resolution says, that both the country at large and the University of Oxford are poorer by his death. England has lost in him a great man of letters, who did more perhaps than any one of our time to unlock for English readers the treasure-house of ancient literature. The University mourns in Dr. Jowett the loss not only of a great Professor and a great Vice-Chancellor but, if I may say so, the last survivor of her own heroic age. But those of

us who belong to Balliol feel that we lament his death with a more intimate and more personal sense of loss. It is almost as difficult for us to think of our College without the Master, as it would have been if he had lived, to think of the Master without the College. For the best part of fifty years their lives have been closely entwined and I am not guilty of extravagance when I say that during the greater part of that time his character and his influence, more than any other single force, have been the thread which has kept unbroken the continuous identity of the College, and which has bound together by a living tie each successive generation of Balliol men. That thread worn out by ceaseless service has at last snapped. It is difficult, as Lord Salisbury has said, perhaps it is impossible, to define or even explain the subtle power of a great personality. It is peculiarly difficult in the case of our late Master. He had none of the vulgar marks of a successful leader, either of thought or of action. He founded no school. He was not the author or the apostle of any system constructive or even critical. In a sense, it is true, he may have left behind him many disciples; and to those who think that a man cannot stamp his impress on his generation unless he is either a dogmatist or a partisan his career will be a standing puzzle. But to us who knew him and saw him in the daily life of the College, the secret of his power is no mystery. We cannot hope to see again even the counterpart of that real and refined intellect in whose presence intellectual lethargy was stirred into life and intellectul pretentiousness sank into abashed silence. Still less can we hope to see a character such as his—a union of worldly sagacity with the most transparent simplicity of nature; ambition keen and unsleeping, but entirely detached from self and wholly absorbed in the fortunes of a great institution and its members; generosity upon which no call could be too heavy, and a delicate kindliness which made the man himself, always busy in great and exacting studies, always ready to give the best hours either of the day or night to help and advise the humblest of those who ap-

pealed to him for aid. Those are the qualities, or some of the qualities, which were the secret of his power and which are buried in his grave. Of no men of our time, of few men of any time can it be more truly said that he lived not in or for himself but in and for his work. Of that work Balliol College was from the beginning, and remained to the end, the centre and the inspiration. He has gone. We who remain and owe him so much may be sure of this, that there is no tribute which would have been more welcome to him, and there is no memorial which can more fitly perpetuate his name, than one which, while it expresses the gratitude and the admiration of Englishmen of every class and creed, shall provide for the continuance of his work within the walls of the College which he loved and served all the days of his life."

After leaving Balliol Mr. Asquith commenced studying for the law. He was called to the Bar in June, 1876. In the following year he married Miss Helen Melland, the daughter of Mr. Frederick Melland, of Manchester. The newly wedded pair made their first home at Hampstead.

Although the young barrister was inspired by the same spirit of thoroughness and patient industry in his new sphere as had characterised him at Balliol, he found it very difficult to make substantial progress. In common with his brethren of the long robe, he journeyed daily to his chambers in the city. Briefs, however, were not plentiful, and for the first few years his experience was not very encouraging. But his signal abilities gradually compelled notice, and at length his labour and perseverance were rewarded, and he figured in some important cases. Immediately his great talents were given fair scope, he advanced with remarkable rapidity to the very front of his profession.

A very smart piece of humour displayed by Mr. Asquith in one of his cases may be related here.

It was during the famous trial of Hawke *v.* Dunn, when the Anti-Gambling League were doing their utmost to prohibit betting on the Kempton Park Racecourse.

MR. ASQUITH IN 1876

Mgoj

Mr. Asquith appeared for the League, and was arguing in favour of the possibility of the course "being a place within the meaning of the Act". During the hearing various more or less acceptable theories were put forward as to what did not constitute a place. "Suppose," said Mr. Justice Wright, who was one of the five common law judges hearing the case, "I were to give you an area marked by the meridians of longitude, would that constitute a place in your opinion, Mr. Asquith?" "That, my Lord," was Mr. Asquith's instant and witty retort, "would be merely a matter of degree," at which the court chuckled considerably.

His first important case was his defence of Mr. Cunninghame Graham and John Burns, who had been apprehended for using Trafalgar Square for public meetings. He conducted the case with conspicuous ability, and although he failed to secure an acquittal, the trial brought his name into prominence.

The famous Parnell trial took place in the following year. Mr. Asquith had for some time been acting as junior to Sir Charles Russell, and for the next nine months he gave himself up to mastering the intricacies of the case. It was only by a mere chance, however, that the occasion proved of such signal advantage to him. Sir Charles Russell had cross-examined Mr. Soames of *The Times* to very little purpose, and during the adjournment for lunch, he told Mr. Asquith to take the next witness. This was Mr. Macdonald, the manager of *The Times*, and one of the most important witnesses. Mr. Asquith reminded his chief of this fact, but Sir Charles replied: "I am tired, and you will do it well enough".

As it turned out, "well enough" proved an inadequate description of Mr. Asquith's work. He achieved a sensational success, and when he had completed Mr. Macdonald's examination, Parnell's innocence was established and the case was as good as won.

Mr. Macdonald was supposed to be a shrewd Scotchman, and it was not anticipated that Mr. Asquith would secure any advantage from his cross-examination. The first

answer of the witness, however, revealed to Mr. Asquith's keen perception the flexible nature of the character before him, and he made the utmost of his discovery. The mind of Mr. Macdonald was literally turned inside out. His cross-examination was one of the most brilliant and skilful displays of word-baiting ever witnessed in a court of law. When Mr. Asquith sat down his reputation as one of the cleverest barristers of the day was assured.

The experience was a decisive one in his fortunes, and although it was, as he said himself, "the merest accident of an accident," it provided the opening which he had needed, and it brought him fame.

Once having gained a great position in the public eye, he went forward by leaps and bounds, and was destined to shortly discard his legal work for greater duties in the service of the State.

## CHAPTER V

### MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

MR. Asquith became the Liberal candidate for East Fife in somewhat peculiar circumstances. The sitting Liberal member for the constituency, Mr. Boyd Kinnear, a gentleman deservedly esteemed, who sought re-election, was at variance with his party on the Home Rule question, declining to support Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy. Mr. Kinnear had the support of some powerful Liberals in the constituency, but at a meeting of the East Fife Liberal and Reform Association, held on 26th June, 1886, it was decisively demonstrated that the great bulk of the party were hostile to his candidature, fifty-three against seven voting that he was an unfit person, on account of his views on Home Rule, to represent Liberalism in Parliament. At the same meeting, Mr. Asquith was requested by an overwhelming majority to stand as the official candidate of the Liberal party.

The prospect was not altogether reassuring. Mr. Asquith came to the constituency a complete stranger, and he had only a week before the polling-day in which to make the acquaintance of the electorate. On the other hand, his opponent, Mr. Kinnear, who had decided to fight the seat, was a very popular and well-known man, and was supported by the dissentient Liberals and the whole force of the Tory party.

Mr. Asquith, however, lost no time and set to work in the highest spirits with a determination to win. The invitation from the Liberal Association asking him to be

their candidate was received by him on the Saturday, and he issued his election address on the following Monday. The address was mainly occupied with a terse and well-reasoned defence of Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy, which was stated to be the issue on which the election was to be fought. Mr. Asquith also declared himself in favour of large reforms in the land laws, the management of local affairs by local representative bodies, registration reform, and the principle of "one man one vote".

Mr. Asquith addressed his first public meeting in the constituency on Monday evening, and announced that he came before the electorate of East Fife "as a member of the advanced section of the Liberal party".

In the course of his campaign he had some lively experiences, hostile resolutions being carried against him at some of his meetings. He was, however, indefatigable in his efforts, and he made astonishing progress. His great reasoning powers and his exceptional ability as a public speaker at once surprised and interested the electors, and attracted crowded attendances at all his meetings. He showed himself remarkably adroit in his handling of numerous interrupters, and more than held his own with the expert "hecklers" by whom he was frequently assailed.

Five days before the poll Mr. Asquith was favoured with a telegram from Mr. Gladstone as follows: "I regard with great interest the candidature of Mr. Asquith, whom I believe to be very highly qualified to uphold in this great struggle the honour of Scotland and the true unity of the Empire, against those who seem to me to be little able to comprehend either the one or the other".

The result of the election, which was looked forward to with general interest, was hailed as a great victory for Mr. Gladstone's policy, and it drew considerable attention to the personality of the successful candidate. The figures were: Mr. H. H. Asquith, Liberal, 2863, Mr. Boyd Kinnear, Dissentient Liberal, 2487.

During the contest Mr. Asquith was greatly assisted by receiving the powerful local support of the *Dundee Advertiser*, which commented on him in very favourable

terms. "He is a speaker," it remarked, "of no ordinary power. In clearness of statement, cogency of argument and effectiveness of illustration we have scarcely heard him surpassed." And after the election it observed: "He grew upon the constituency by leaps and bounds. He won general regard, and if a longer contest had been possible, he would have gained a greater victory."

Mr. Asquith did not enter Parliament as an obscure personage. He had already made a reputation as a man of considerable intellectual and oratorical ability, and he was looked upon as a decided acquisition to the forces on the Liberal benches. From the first much was expected from him, and the occasion of his maiden speech therefore was invested with more than ordinary interest. It is significant of the position he had already attained, that *The Times* devoted a column and a half to the report of the speech, and that it received widespread notice in the press, the parliamentary correspondent of the *Birmingham Daily Post* commenting on it as "an uncommonly good maiden speech".

The speech was delivered on 24th March, 1887, in the course of an important debate, contributed to by the leaders of all parties, on a Government motion that precedence over other business should be given to the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Bill, which was in charge of Mr. A. J. Balfour, then Irish Secretary.

Mr. Asquith intervened on the third night of the debate, and opposed the motion on the ground that there was no justification in the state of Ireland for such a measure. He said that the Government were inviting the House to display a trustfulness, not to say credulity, which might well tax the faith of the most disciplined majority. He fully accepted the doctrine that it was the duty of the Executive at all times and in all places to enforce the law, whether it was good or bad, without discrimination of persons. Though he was a loyal member of his party, and a faithful follower of his leader, he did not think that the fact that the Liberal Government of 1881 committed what he conceived to be a colossal and

disastrous mistake was any reason why under the guise of a Conservative Government the blunder should be repeated. It was admitted, he continued, that during the last six months there had been less crime in Ireland than during almost any period in its history, and what crime had occurred had been principally in the south and west, where statements of rent had been refused, where evictions had been most frequent in number, and grave and cruel in character, and where the standard of rent was abnormally high. With regard to boycotting, he agreed with Lord Salisbury that it was one of those impalpable things which legislation could not reach, and the only remedy for it was to alter the conditions out of which it sprung. In concluding, he observed that there was much to be said for a complete democracy and for a powerful and well-equipped autocracy, but "for the hybrid system which the Government were about to set up, a system which pretended to be that which it was not, and was not that which it pretended to be—a system which could not be called either resolutely repressive or frankly popular—for this half-hearted compromise there was inevitably reserved the inexorable sentence which history showed must fall on every form of political imposture".

The speech was a very successful one, and frequently evoked laughter and cheers from the Liberal benches, especially one portion of it in which he made a racy attack on the Liberal Dissentients. His fine eloquence, great reasoning power, and the admirable lucidity of his language, together with the brilliant fighting qualities he displayed, convinced all who heard him that he possessed political abilities of no common scope and power. Mr. Chamberlain, who followed him, said: "I do not know whether the speech to which we have just listened is the maiden speech of my honourable friend, but whether it is or not, I think that all who have heard him will agree with me that his speech is a favourable augury of the position he is likely to fill in our parliamentary contests".

The speech did not suit *The Times*, which made a contemptuous reference to it in its leading article; but

the Liberal press were delighted with it. The *Daily News*, in cordially approving it, said that Mr. Chamberlain ought to have attempted a further reply to so formidable an opponent. An interesting comment on the speech appeared in an article written some years later by Mr. T. P. O'Connor, our modern "public analyst" of prominent men: "The very first time Mr. Asquith raised his voice in the House of Commons that assembly recognised a master, an ideal speaker, and a powerful debater. A few sentences were needed to confirm this impression, and ever since Mr. Asquith has never intervened in discussion without profoundly influencing his audience."

On 25th May, the day after the event occurred, Mr. Asquith wrote a letter to *The Times* respecting the secession from the Eighty Club of its Liberal Unionist members, a matter which in view of recent political developments is of some interest. The crisis was brought about by a request from the Liberal Unionist section that Mr. Chamberlain should be invited to address the members of the club. This was refused by the club committee. A general meeting of members was then held, at which a resolution was proposed on behalf of the Liberal Unionists that the guests of the club should not be selected solely from one section of the Liberal party. To this an amendment was moved committing the club to an active support of Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule policy. The amendment was carried by an overwhelming majority, and as a result the Liberal Unionists, including Lord Hartington, John Bright, Mr., now Lord Goschen, and Mr. Chamberlain, resigned.

The affair naturally aroused considerable comment, and Mr. Asquith's letter was written in defence of the club and in correction of some inaccurate statements concerning its proceedings. "The choice lay," he wrote, "between the loss of valuable members and the complete paralysis of the club. We delayed making it as long as we could, but the occasion was at last forced upon us by the minority, and as we had to choose I do not see how, having regard

to the views of the majority and the objects of the club, we could have done otherwise than we did."

A speech which drew great attention to Mr. Asquith, and brought him to the knowledge of many Liberals as a man of exceptional promise to the party, was one he made at the meeting of the National Liberal Federation at Nottingham on 18th October, 1887.

He was selected for the important duty of moving the following resolution—"That this Council rejoices to know that the policy of conciliating the people of Ireland by granting them a legislative body for the management of what Parliament shall decide to be distinctively Irish affairs, which was urged upon the country by the representatives assembled at the Leeds meeting of the Federation last year, has since that time grown steadily and rapidly in favour with the English public, and it looks forward with confidence to the early settlement of the Irish question on the principles set forth by Mr. Gladstone, and under his direction". Mr. Asquith contrasted the position of Home Rule then with what it occupied a year previous when the Federation met at Leeds, and he declared that the issue of Home Rule was finally and irrevocably fixed on the day when the Crimes Bill was introduced in the House of Commons with the sanction and support of the Liberal Unionists. Speaking as a very humble member of the Liberal party, he said, and unable to bind anybody but himself, he ventured to express the opinion that the limits of reasonable and practicable concession had been reached. It was a very good thing to do what they could to recover the lost sheep, but they might pay too high a price for the capitulation of Birmingham. He was perfectly content to leave the matter in the hands of Mr. Gladstone, whose presence at their head was worth a hundred battalions. To the youngest it was an inspiration, and to the oldest it was an example. To one and all it was a living lesson of devotion, hopefulness and vitality. Let them rejoice that one survivor of the heroic age of English politics had entered on the last struggle of a life spent on the battlefields of freedom ; and let them, lesser men of a later day,

be proud that in such an enterprise, and under such omens they were permitted to obey his summons and follow where he led.

The speech made a great impression on the experienced politicians who listened to it, and it roused and delighted a critical audience. Sir William Harcourt, speaking to the meeting later, said that there was one thing middle-aged politicians looked forward to with gratitude and hope, and that was the promise of the future, and he was sure he only echoed the sentiments of that distinguished assembly when he congratulated them upon that speech with which the proceedings were opened. He referred to the speech of Mr. Asquith, which showed that the future hopes of the Liberal party were bright and that statesmanship and eloquence were still living among them. Mr. Morley in his address also referred to it as "an eloquent and powerful speech". Sir Wemyss Reid, in his admirable biography of Mr. Gladstone, remarks that the above speech was the one in which Mr. Asquith first made his mark.

On 30th July, 1888, Mr. Asquith intervened in a discussion in Parliament on the Parnell Commission Bill, on the motion of the Government to insert the names of the Commissioners. Mr. Asquith's connection with the Parnell case entitled him to speak with authority on this subject. He said that he voiced the opinions of others besides those of his own party when he severely blamed the Government for not consulting the leaders of the Opposition as to the constitution of the Commission. Such a course, he argued, would have obviated any public discussion of the merits of the gentlemen nominated, and he characterised the policy adopted as unfair to the judges, to the Irish members and to the House of Commons as a whole.

On 7th August, 1888, he again took part in a discussion on the same bill but "as amended," on an amendment requiring *The Times* to furnish particulars of certain charges and allegations. He said what was wanted was to require the Commissioners to demand from the person who came forward in support of these charges such par-

ticulars as in the judgment of the Commissioners would prevent surprise and thus secure justice. He had read the compilation known as "Parnellism and Crime," and he described it as a collection of insinuations and innuendo. Quoting two extracts he stigmatised their author as an anonymous coward, who had been guilty of the most scandalous violation of the honourable profession of journalism, and had shown complete ignorance of even the elementary rules of fair play. The most rudimentary considerations of justice demanded, he said, that these men should know beforehand what was the charge they had to meet. Unless the amendment was adopted there would be serious risk that the inquiry would be converted into an instrument of the gravest unfairness and injustice.

*The Times* was naturally greatly incensed by this pungent speech, and in its leading article it fiercely attacked Mr. Asquith, sneering at him as "a clever person with a good chance of one day rivalling the fame of Sir William Harcourt".

Mr. Asquith had now firmly established his reputation as a parliamentary debater of considerable ability with an admirable power of lucid statement. He took a keen interest in the Irish question but rarely intervened in the debates, speaking only when he could be useful, and when he had something worth saying. On 1st March, 1887, in a brilliant debating speech he supported Mr. Morley on an amendment which censured the Government's policy in Ireland as harsh, oppressive and unjust, and prayed for the adoption of such a measure of conciliation as would bring about a real union between the two countries. In the course of his speech, Mr. Asquith charged Mr. Balfour with having made "rollicking and roystering speeches in which he had sharpened a very pretty wit on the alleged absurdities of a man who could not reply to him, and had written or dictated letters which would serve as models for all time of smart and flippant inaccuracy". Referring to the threat of the Ulster landlords to actively resist a Home Rule Parliament, he said that "these gentlemen, instead of dying in the last ditch would, on the gentle compulsion of

seventeen and a half years' purchase of judicial rent, quietly leave the post of honour and duty in the direction of the Holyhead boat, with their pockets well stuffed with English sovereigns". The speech was a very successful one, and Mr. H. W. Lucy, in his unrivalled parliamentary diary, comments on it in the following terms: "When Mr. Asquith rose it was a quarter past ten and a dull night. But gradually, as the young barrister went forward with a speech marked by conspicuous debating power, and illumined with felicitous phrases, the benches rapidly filled, and when he sat down the House presented the eager, restless, almost tumultuous appearance, which marks it only two or three times in a session."

An even more successful speech, and one that attracted widespread attention because of Mr. Asquith's special position in the matter, was that in which he replied to the Attorney-General, Sir Richard Webster, in the course of the discussion in Parliament on the Parnell Commission. The speech was a short but most masterly one, completely exposing the utter inconsistency of the Attorney-General's statements. Mr. Asquith said he intervened in the discussion with great reluctance, and had abstained from doing so hitherto for obvious reasons, but matters had now reached a stage, that, in the interests of historical accuracy, it was desirable there should be made perfectly clear the actual state of the case. He showed that the assertion made by the Attorney-General, but afterwards withdrawn, that he (the Attorney-General) had spontaneously volunteered five days before Piggott went into the box to furnish the other side with materials for testing this witness, was entirely inaccurate, and Mr. Asquith informed the House that instead of the letter of 11th November being produced voluntarily, it was produced in response to a call during examination, which had to be responded to. Instead of the letter being produced five days before, it was tendered on 20th February, just as Piggott was about to enter the witness-box. Whereas, previously, continued Mr. Asquith, in his almost cruel criticism of his hapless opponent, the Attorney-General

had stated that he had communicated to him (Mr. Asquith) and Sir Charles Russell the incriminating letters from Piggott, in which he admitted he would be discredited on examination, he now confessed that he had never sent the letter, but that he had sent a letter not written by Piggott but to Piggott, which contained a reference to the letter of 11th November. Mr. Asquith concluded his powerful speech with the biting remark that he would leave the House to decide, with these facts before it, which were borne out by the official shorthand notes, whether these two statements amounted to the same thing.

Another notable speech on the Commission was delivered by Mr. Asquith on 7th March, 1890. *The Times* reported it *verbatim*, and attached so much importance to it as to devote its leading article to an attempt to refute its arguments. The writer of the article referred to the speech as a very clever speech, and to Mr. Asquith as a very clever young man. The speech drew from Mr. Lucy the comment that Mr. Asquith was rising to the first rank as a parliamentary debater.

Mr. Asquith was far from being a frequent speaker in Parliament at this time, speaking scarcely more than once in a session, but when he did speak he secured the interested attention of his audience, and always succeeded in profoundly impressing it, and he gradually gained a solid reputation as a rising statesman of great ability and sound judgment.

One of the phases of politics in which he showed an exceptional interest was what are termed labour politics, and he never shrank from actively supporting practical proposals, however unpopular, which coincided with the logical outcome of his democratic principles. On 29th March, 1889, he took part in a discussion in Parliament on a resolution in favour of the payment of members, and he put the case for payment in its most convincing form.

He said that such a proposal must be justified in the circumstances of our time and country, and in the interests, not of this class and that, but of the nation as a whole, and he believed it could be so justified. He asserted that the proposal was necessary for the completion of our

democratic system. Why, he asked, should the franchise be given to all, and the area for selection of leaders be limited to the moneyed classes? He was convinced that so long as men who earned their livelihood by labour could not get to Parliament without special provision by their class or constituency, the people could not have perfect freedom of choice, and therefore could not give full effect to the principle of democratic legislation. The total charge involved, if members were paid at the rate of £370 per annum, would be £250,000. That small charge, he pertinently suggested, could be met by arranging official salaries upon a more moderate and reasonable scale, by reducing ornamental sinecures, and by curtailing the grossly unreasonable pension and superannuation system. He could not see any difference between paying a member of the Government a salary for the performance of administrative and executive work, and paying a member of the House of Commons a salary for the discharge of the equally important work of exposing the blunders of Ministers and correcting their mistakes. In reply to [illegible] that this proposal would create a [illegible] professional politician, he pointed to the rich rewards offered to politicians by the chance of office, and apart from this, he added, it was notorious that some men became members of Parliament because it assisted them to get on in their business or profession, and because it gratified the most vulgar of all forms of vulgar ambition, *viz.*, the desire to get into what was called Society. The present system was defective. On the one hand, it did not adequately reflect the different interests and opinions of the various classes, and on the other hand, it excluded from the service of the State, on account of inadequate private means, men eminently well qualified for such service.

On 9th June, 1899, Mr. Asquith was the guest of the Oxford Union Palmerston Club at a dinner presided over by Lord Acton. In responding to the toast of "The Houses of Parliament," Mr. Asquith made an important speech on the questions of Home Rule and the Reform of the House of Lords. The matter of the speech we

deal with elsewhere, but we notice the occasion here because it serves to illustrate the remarkable progress Mr. Asquith was making in his political career. The speech was made only three years after Mr. Asquith entered Parliament, and yet it was treated by the press as an utterance of the first importance. The *Spectator*, which, though proving itself the most formidable journalistic critic of Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy, was always distinguished by the courtesy and fairness with which it treated its opponents, considered Mr. Asquith's speech of great significance, and referred to it in the following terms: "The Federalist policy of the Home Rulers is announced at last. The first definite signal was given by Mr. Asquith in a speech at the Oxford Union Palmerston Club dinner, at the Oxford Town Hall, last Saturday. That speech showed us that we were on the eve of a public pronouncement of Mr. Gladstone's new policy, and the announcement came in the speech (by Mr. Gladstone) at St. Austell on Wednesday, when the claims of Scotland and Wales to local parliaments were

The inference of the moment is that Mr. Asquith had been taken into Mr. Gladstone's confidence on this question of supreme importance. Such a supposition was a tribute to the immense political progress Mr. Asquith had made, and the great political position he had attained in so short a time. Further evidence of the young barrister's advance can be gained from the fact that his speeches attracted the criticism of all the leading organs of the Unionist party, *The Times*, the *Spectator* and the *Saturday Review* especially marking them out for attention. Mr. Asquith was also singled out for notice by the Unionist leaders. Lord Salisbury, who was not given to public eulogiums, honoured Mr. Asquith with commendation and complimentary criticism, and Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain were equally generous.

Mr. Asquith has always been a friend of religious liberty and equality, and he has a mind singularly free from sectarian bias. On 4th February, 1891, he made an eloquent speech in support of Mr. Gladstone's "Religious

Disabilities Removal Bill," the object of which was to enable Roman Catholics to hold the offices of Lord Chancellor of England, and Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.

He said it was surprising that after sixty years of growing freedom the doctrine of religious liberty should be questioned. We had opened the avenues of public life to Roman Catholics, Jews and Agnostics. During the last twenty years, Roman Catholic subjects of the Crown had filled high positions in every department of the service of the State, and their allegiance, devotion and trust had never been questioned. There was nothing in the office of Lord Chancellor that should exclude it from Roman Catholics. The bill made it impossible for a Catholic Lord Chancellor to have any voice whatever in the distribution of privilege. A Jew, a Nonconformist, a Churchman and an Agnostic might take this post, but not a Catholic. The First Lord of the Treasury, the Secretary of State, the Foreign Secretary might be a Catholic but not the Lord Chancellor. Sixty years ago the principle of religious exclusion was entrenched in this country behind a most imposing array of legal barriers and securities. One after another of its strong places had been captured and its walls battered down, until all that remained was this paltry little corner, a solitary and belated relic of a past that could not be revived. The finger of fate was upon it; although they might for a few years retard, they could not avert its downfall.

On 28th June, 1892, Parliament having run its normal course was dissolved. The Liberal party entered upon the general election which followed with the greatest enthusiasm, confident that the result of the polls would give them a commanding majority.

Mr. Asquith issued his election address on 28th June, 1892, and as it forms a concisely worded and closely reasoned statement of his political views at that time, we quote it in full:—

## TO THE ELECTORS OF THE EASTERN DIVISION OF FIFE.

GENTLEMEN,—

I ask for renewal of the trust which you confided in me six years ago.

The country has been governed since 1886 by a Coalition resting upon the support of a composite majority. Its policy has been so contrived as to give effect to the reactionary views of the Tories, who form the bulk of its supporters, both in Parliament and in the country, and at the same time to conciliate the dwindling scruples, and to smooth the downward path, of a small contingent of deserters from the Liberal camp.

Its essential Toryism has been prominently manifested in the enactment of a permanent coercion law for Ireland; in the administration of that law by methods which were at once lawless and oppressive; in the proposal to create, at the expense of the taxpayer, a new vested interest in public-house licences: in an unsound and deceptive finance, which has wastefully distributed imaginary surpluses, created partly by borrowing, and partly by encroaching upon the fund set aside for the repayment of the National Debt; and in the avowed and authoritative approval recently given by the Prime Minister to the hankerings of the less intelligent among his followers after a return to the system of fiscal Protection, from which our trade was fifty years ago set free by the efforts of Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright.

On the other hand, the measures, on the faith of which the Coalition has sought, and seeks, to establish a title to Liberal support, have been half-hearted, superficial, and incomplete. The most conspicuous items in a meagre catalogue are the Local Government Acts for England and Scotland, which make no provision for parochial self-government, or for the popular control of the police, and upon the latter of which free education was engrafted by the exertions of the Scottish Liberal members; the Land Purchase Act for Ireland, whose operation depends upon the will of the individual landlord; and the Small Holdings Act of the present year, which its authors have deprived of real and effective vitality by the deliberate omission of compulsory powers.

While the time of Parliament has been thus mischievously or fruitlessly employed, the opinion of the nation has been ripening over almost the whole area of the social and political field.

The claim of Ireland to legislate for and administer her local concerns no longer occasions alarm or bewilderment. After full consideration and discussion, it is seen to be nothing more than a demand for the application to a particular and most urgent case of the principle of self-government, and the method of devolution, which are familiar weapons in the Liberal armoury. The real security for permanent political union between Great Britain and Ireland is perceived to lie in the indissoluble community of their social and material interests. The supposed difficulties in the way of reconciling local autonomy with Imperial supremacy are academic cobwebs, which do not trouble practical men, and which will yield to good sense and good faith. The minority in Ireland, recognising that their interests have been amply safeguarded, will turn a deaf ear to the insincere and hysterical incitements of British onlookers in search of party capital, and will loyally acquiesce in Home Rule, as they did in the Disestablishment of the Irish Church.

The case of Ireland is of paramount urgency, but the attention of the next Parliament must be given from the first to British concerns also. Long arrears have to be overtaken. New wants, of which the people have been long half conscious, but which are now for the first time finding articulate expression, have to be faced and dealt with.

I am one of those who believe that the collective action of the community may and ought to be employed, positively as well as negatively; to raise as well as to level; to equalise opportunities no less than to curtail privileges; to make the freedom of the individual a reality and not a pretence.

We cannot hope for any large or lasting improvement, either in the spirit or in the methods of our Government, without a constant adaptation of the machinery to the work which it has to do. I desire to see, from the bottom to the top of the political structure, the application at every stage of the principle of popular self-government in its freest

and most unfettered form. I am, therefore, in favour of the establishment of Parochial and District Councils elected by and responsible to the ratepayers; of the discontinuance in local elections of the cumulative vote; of the abolition in all elections, Parliamentary or local, of plural voting; of restricting the length of the voters' qualifying period; of providing for a continuous, instead of an annual, registration; of making the necessary cost of elections a public charge; of paying members of Parliament; of shortening the duration of Parliaments; of putting an end to a hereditary Chamber; and, as time and opportunity allow, of delegating Local business to Local Bodies, and reserving the time and energies of the Imperial Parliament for matters which concern more than one part of the United Kingdom and the Empire as a whole.

Institutions are only means to an end, and even with our present imperfect instruments a majority honestly bent on reform may accomplish much. Religious equality must be brought about with an equitable regard for existing interests. The traffic in intoxicating drink must be subjected to direct popular control. A portion, at least, of the funds which, under recent arrangements, have been allotted from Imperial funds to the Local Authorities must be rescued for the purpose of endowing Scotland with a system of secondary and intermediate education, worthy of her traditions, and accessible to all her people. The supervision of the Scottish fisheries must be put in the hands of representative bodies in touch with the fishermen; greater facilities should be provided for obtaining necessary bait; and private usurpations of fishing rights must be closely investigated and rigorously prevented. The customary rights of the public in respect of inland fishing, and to the free use for legitimate purposes of uncultivated mountains and moorlands, require legislative definition and sanction. Our Local Authorities both in the town and the country should be invested with the fullest powers for the compulsory acquisition, upon fair terms, of land for any purpose in which the locality is interested. The dates of the removal term in country districts in Scotland should be put back to a time more suitable to the convenience and health of the rural labourers.

The right of free combination must be placed upon a secure footing by a statutory reconstruction of the Law of Conspiracy. In the case of miners, and of some classes of railway servants, the time has come for a legislative limitation of the hours of labour. Finally, our whole system of taxation, Imperial and local, demands revision, so that the burden may be more fairly apportioned between industry and property, and the community enabled to take its fair share of values which result, not from individual exertion, but from social progress.

These, gentlemen, are the tasks which lie immediately before us. If you desire to see them performed promptly and thoroughly, you will entrust the government of the country to the party of progress, which looks forward to the future with faith and without fear. The County of Fife has never since the Reform Act returned a Tory to the House of Commons. I appeal to you to maintain, without breach or blot, the unbroken and unstained tradition of sixty years.

I am,
Gentlemen,
Your faithful servant,
H. H. ASQUITH.

28th June, 1892.

Mr. Asquith conducted an exceptionally vigorous campaign with remarkable ability, and set an example of untiring energy to his body of devoted workers. Excitement ran high during the contest and a very heavy vote was polled. The result was announced as follows: Mr. Asquith, Liberal, 3743, J. G. Gilmour, Liberal Unionist, 3449, Liberal majority, 294. This majority showed a decrease of 82 on Mr. Asquith's election in 1886.

As to the general election as a whole, the result was not satisfactory to Mr. Gladstone. The great Unionist majority, reduced during the Conservative Government's term of office from 116 to 66, had certainly been converted into a Home Rule majority of 40, but that margin was far too small for the work Mr. Gladstone had in hand. He had hoped to sweep the country and return with a majority at his back large enough to overawe the House of Lords, and possibly to render him independent of the Irish party. Instead of that he had obtained a majority which was dangerously small, even for the ordinary work of Parliament, and which only served to inspire boldness and confidence into the House of Lords. And above all, there was the hard and bitter fact that England, the predominant partner, had decided against him. The magnificent organisation of the Unionist party, and the immense power of the Unionist press, had been exerted to the utmost in a desperate attempt to achieve victory. The effort had failed only nominally, virtually it had secured a result that was the death-sentence to Home Rule.

Lord Salisbury did not follow the recent precedents set by defeated Premiers of resigning before the meeting of Parliament, which took place on 4th August, 1892.

The Queen's Speech, issued by the Conservative Government, was very short, and in the opinion of the Liberal party it required the insertion of another sentence. "It is Her Majesty's hope," so ran the concluding words of the "Speech," "that you will continue to advance in the path of usefulness and beneficent legislation which has been so judiciously followed in previous sessions." "We feel it, however," added the Opposition, in the amendment moved by Mr. Asquith, "to be our duty, humbly to submit to your Majesty, that your Majesty's Government should possess the confidence of this House and of the country, and respectfully to represent to your Majesty that that confidence is not reposed in your present advisers."

Mr. Asquith delivered a fighting speech, admirably suited to the occasion, and he drew forth repeated

volleys of applause from his party, to whom the speech gave the greatest satisfaction. *The Times* attempted to decry it, and remarked that "it could hardly be said that Mr. Asquith's speech, though extremely adroit and ingenious, answered to the general expectation, or was worthy of his high parliamentary position".

The selection of Mr. Asquith to move the Opposition amendment was taken generally as indicating that he was destined for high office in the new adminstration. It was well known that his character and abilities were held in great esteem by Mr. Gladstone, of whom he had shown himself a devoted follower.

The *Spectator* commented upon the choice of Mr. Asquith as follows: "We should be very sorry to assume that the choice of Mr. Asquith as the mover of the amendment on the address expressing want of confidence in the Government, is an indication that Mr. Gladstone intends to commit himself to Mr. Asquith's suggestion in favour of Home Rule all round. Indeed, it might very possibly mean that Mr. Gladstone wishes to recognise frankly, though without compromising himself, the conspicuous ability of one of his supporters, with whose conception of the solution of the Irish problem he would rather not be identified." The *Spectator* regarded Mr. Asquith as the chief mover in the agitation for Home Rule all round, and as the leader of the advanced Liberals, and it continued its article as follows: "We may fairly regard his selection as at least a signal mark of respect for the earliest and boldest representative of the Federal solution of the Irish question".

The only point argued against Mr. Asquith's political prospects at this time was the fact that he was a lawyer, and as this was made much of then and has been since by unfavourable critics, the following extract from Mr. Lucy's diary of 6th March, 1891, is of interest:—

"Mr. Asquith has so thoroughly identified himself with affairs in the House of Commons, and has gained so prominent a position, that it seems hard to believe he took his seat so recently as 1886. But that is the case. From

the delivery of his earliest speech, Mr. Gladstone marked him out with favouring glance, and he has since gone on gaining the good opinion of the House. It is an odd but familiar fact that success at the Bar, achieved in whatever degree, does not necessarily imply triumph in the House of Commons. The fact is indeed directly to the contrary. . . . Why a man when he stands in wig and gown arguing a difficult case before three judges, or appealing to the passions and prejudices of a jury, should, when he divests himself of his robes and speaks in the House of Commons utterly fail to carry weight, is one of those interesting problems that have never been solved. Human nature is absolutely alike whether confronted in a court of justice or in the House of Commons. In both there are the actual elements of a judge and jury; and yet the successful barrister is rarely a power in the House of Commons. There are perhaps only two exceptions in recent years, and the rarity of the cases proves the rule. One was the young barrister who came into the Parliament of 1874 as member for Durham City. The other is Mr. Asquith. There is sufficient similarity between the legal and parliamentary style of Lord Herschell and Mr. Asquith to justify the opinion Mr. Gladstone is known to hold, that the latter will in time go quite as far as the former. Both commanded the attention of the House by their maiden speech, and succeeded as the sessions passed in strengthening the favourable impression. Whilst both bring to parliamentary debate the orderly arrangement of matter and the lucidity of expression acquired by legal training, neither has the *je ne sais quoi* of the Bar manner and tone. As they join in parliamentary debate, you do not 'almost hear the rustling' of their stuff or silk gowns."

## CHAPTER VI

### HOME SECRETARY

THE appointment of Mr. Asquith as Home Secretary in Mr. Gladstone's 1892 administration was generally received as a surprise. All expected that he would be given an important post, but it was not anticipated that he would rise, after serving in only one Parliament, straight from the position of a private member to the great office of Secretary of State for Home Affairs with a seat in the Cabinet.

His progress had been extraordinary. It was only six years ago since he became a member of Parliament. He was then only a young barrister, certainly showing signs of uncommon ability, but politically he had no established reputation or position. From 1886 to 1892 he was not very much in evidence at the House of Commons, and he did not deliver above a dozen speeches in the House during the whole six years, though he spoke more frequently in the country. The necessity for strict attention to his profession, combined with his public political engagements, prevented him from taking any share in the laborious drudgery of the committee work of the House.

But the conspicuous lucidity of his intellect, his great debating powers and his sound political judgment had impressed both the leaders and the rank and file of the Liberal party, and there were few who did not think he was equal to the high post to which he had been appointed.

*The Times*, commenting on the constitution of the new Ministry, said that "one of the surprises is the offer of the Home Office to Mr. Asquith. Though evidently

designated for political promotion, it was generally assumed that a different post would be placed at his disposal, involving a less distinct abandonment of a legal for a political career."

The *Daily News* heartily approved the appointment. "Mr. Asquith has proved himself an excellent lawyer, but he shines in politics even better than in law. He is a sound Liberal and a thorough Democrat. He has never spoken in the House of Commons without conspicuous success, while he has few rivals at public meetings for brilliant and effective oratory. There are, however, more important things in life than effective rhetoric, and it is his invaluable faculty of judgment which has more especially earned for Mr. Asquith the confidence of the Liberal leaders. An intimate acquaintance with the House of Commons and a capacity for debate are absolutely necessary if the most vulnerable and the most frequently attacked of all departments is to be adequately defended where alone defence is of any avail."

The last sentence of the above extract indicated the highly responsible nature of the office Mr. Asquith had accepted. It is difficult to realise adequately the enormous extent and complexity of the duties required to be performed by a conscientious and capable Secretary of State for Home Affairs. In England he combines in his own person most of the functions which, on the Continent, are divided among the Ministries of Justice, of Industry, and of the Interior, while in addition to those he has many functions which belong to the Minister of Education.

In a Liberal Government especially there is no position that needs in a greater degree debating skill, sound judgment, strength of mind and tenacity of purpose, combined with infinite tact and patience, than that of the Secretary of State for Home Affairs. He is exposed to attack from all quarters, and he is overburdened with legislative and administrative work. With the Tories, on the one side, scenting revolutionary designs in all his proposals, and the advanced Radicals, on the other, murmuring at the moderation of his reforms; and with deputations

of threatening aspect continually waiting upon him, some urging upon him some change and others exhorting him against it, the path of duty is anything but a smooth one.

And the position of affairs in 1892 was exceptionally disadvantageous. The Government, with its small majority of forty, could not afford to alienate even the smallest section of its supporters, and the band of Radicals, bent on forcing great social reforms, composed a determined and formidable body of political fighters, not easily pacified and not possessed of too much patience.

A strong effort was made by this group to "hustle" the Home Secretary, but they found in Mr. Asquith a statesman who combined with an overflowing sympathy for social reform, a firm and unyielding determination to excute justice and to maintain social freedom and order. During his term of office he gave many proofs of his qualities in this respect, and early in his Ministerial career an occasion arose that put them to the test.

This was what was known as the Trafalgar Square agitation, a matter that caused considerable feeling at the time, and one which brought to public notice those qualities of firm-mindedness and practical dealing for which Mr. Asquith's administration became distinguished.

On 19th October, 1892, a powerful deputation from the Executive of the Metropolitan Radical Federation waited upon Mr. Asquith to ask for permission to hold a demonstration in Trafalgar Square on 13th November, and to urge that the order of 13th November, 1887, should be modified. For some time previous there had been considerable agitation in Socialist quarters on this question, and threats had been made, if permission were not granted, to hold meetings without leave. The Tory press commented on the subject with great relish, and ironically professed to feel great sympathy with Mr. Asquith in what they described as his quarrel with the London Radical supporters of the Government. There was also a slight personal complication, as Mr. Asquith had pleaded in the Law Courts, as counsel in the Cunning-

hame Graham case, that it was lawful to hold public meetings in the Square.

The following is a very brief history of the question: By an Act of Parliament of 1844 the property in the soil of the Square was vested in the Crown, and the care, control, management and regulation were placed in the hands of what is now the Commissioner of Works. Up to 1886 the Square was used occasionally for public meetings. In February, 1886, a meeting was held which was attended by some deplorable incidents, a portion of the crowd being guilty of acts of outrage and robbery. After this the number of meetings held in the Square increased at such a rate that in the autumn of 1887 the frequency and magnitude of the crowds became a public nuisance. Meetings were held day after day, and were preceded by processions through the streets. These proceedings seriously obstructed the traffic, and hindered business by keeping customers away from the shops and guests from the hotels in the districts affected. Further, a not ill-founded feeling of apprehension and uneasiness was created among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In consequence of this state of affairs, on the 13th November, 1887, Sir Charles Warren, the then Commissioner of the Police for the Metropolis, issued a police order prohibiting the assembling of persons in the Square or the passing of organised processions along the adjacent thoroughfares. It was this order which the Home Secretary was urged to rescind.

Mr. Asquith made a very practical reply to the deputations which waited upon him. Regarding the situation that existed in 1887, he said: "I do not hesitate to say that the state of things which grew up at that time constituted an intolerable public nuisance, and so long as I am responsible for the peace and good order of the Metropolis, it shall not be permitted to recur". He said the question he had to consider was whether, having regard to all the facts of the case, the law-abiding people of London were to be permanently excluded at all times, however convenient, under any conditions, however reasonable, for any

purpose, however legitimate, from this accustomed place of meeting. In his opinion that question must be answered in the negative, and the Government therefore proposed, on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, or on any Bank Holiday, to allow any meeting of which fitting notice had been given to the police, which obeyed the instructions of the police, and which dispersed before nightfall. In closing his speech he warned the deputation that it was only by the harmonious co-operation of those who were genuinely interested in free speech with the authorities that that privilege could be enjoyed, safeguarded and reconciled with the general convenience of public life.

*The Times*, in an article approving the speech, said that "Mr. Asquith's treatment of the question was marked by moderation and commonsense. This is his first public appearance as Home Secretary, and his attitude certainly goes somewhat to justify his selection for the post. The speech was remarkable for its practical tone, and its freedom from sentiment and twaddle."

The *Spectator* also approved the speech with the comment that "Mr. Asquith extricated himself from his nearly impossible position with fine adroitness and without shuffling".

During the recess Mr. Asquith made several speeches, one of the most interesting being that on 24th November, 1892, at the Eighty Club, when he foreshadowed the future legislation of the Government, and enunciated his views of the spirit that should actuate the policy of the Liberal party.

"In my opinion," he said, "while there must always be a continuity of opinion in the sphere of foreign and colonial affairs, I hold it to be the duty of the present Ministers, in regard to domestic questions, to reverse the policy of their predecessors, and so carry out the mandate they have received. The purpose of the Government was that the administration of the great departments of the State should be carried on in a sympathetic and considerate spirit—not with a maudlin and sentimental disposition to give way to every cry and every clamour that was raised,

but with an honest and resolute determination, so far as the powers of the law allowed, to give the widest possible extension to the exercise of the enjoyment of popular rights." This was a clear intimation to the extreme Radical Labour section that he was determined not to indulge in any violent legislative projects, but to pursue a commonsense sympathetic policy of social reform that would meet with the support of the country.

On 20th January, 1893, he made a memorable speech at a great meeting of the National Liberal Federation at Liverpool. Referring to the work already accomplished by the Government, he asserted that since the Liberal party had been in power, the administration in every department connected with the life of the people had been infused with the spirit of Liberalism. He instanced the fact that notwithstanding the Free Education Act nearly one-fifth of the elementary schools in England and Wales were still charging fees. An abuse like this, he contended, depended entirely upon the spirit in which the department administered the Act, and the Liberal Government had immediately taken steps to ensure that free education should be a reality and not a sham, without distinction of class, and that great privilege was now being fully enjoyed. He eulogised Mr. Morley's Irish policy and said that since the days of Thomas Drummond no Englishman ever secured in anything like the same degree the confidence and sympathy of the great mass of the Irish people which Mr. Morley enjoyed. Mr. Asquith spoke of Parnell as the leader who had deserted the party that had idolised him, but who had done more for them than any other Irish leader in the whole of their national history.

On 31st January, 1893, Parliament assembled amid signs of extraordinary political interest and excitement. There was every element in the situation for dramatic developments. The smallness of the Government's majority, resting entirely on the fidelity of the Irish Nationalists, an uncertain quantity at all times, put any event within the range of possibility. There was, too, the additional danger of the extreme Radical wing of the party

becoming disaffected. The members composing this section were noted for their independence of spirit, and it was not expected that either considerations of party loyalty or the exigencies of the political situation would have much weight with them if the particular reforms on which they were set were not given preference in the legislative programme of the Government.

Contrasting with this lack of cohesion among the Ministerial forces was the absolute unity of the Opposition. The Unionist party was practically an absolutely united force, animated with a fierce determination to defeat Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy. Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain were earnestly desirous of sinking all minor differences, and they set an example of harmonious co-operation to their respective followers. They were supported by a number of exceptionally able debaters and public speakers, and they had the unswerving support of the most powerful partisan press the country has ever known.

The great consoling fact to the Liberals was the continued leadership of Mr. Gladstone. His great figure stood out in solitary grandeur above all his political contemporaries, and so long as his incomparable political genius and overpowering personality remained at its service, the party did not fear any developments. His commanding influence was sufficient, it was felt, to secure the steady support of all the sections of the party, and Liberals regarded with well-grounded confidence his ability, with the aid of his able lieutenants, to more than hold his own in the fierce debating struggle that was impending.

Mr. Asquith's first important speech in Parliament as a Minister of the Crown was made in reply to an amendment to the address moved by Mr. J. Redmond, requesting the reconsideration of the sentences on the Irish Dynamiters.

A brief history of the matter may be of interest to all. The Dynamiters numbered fourteen persons divided into four groups. Of the first group Gallagher and Whitehead were the leaders. Whitehead for two months carried on a nitro-glycerine factory in Birmingham; Gallagher in

London was his paymaster. Gallagher passed backwards and forwards between Birmingham and London, and through the agency of Wilson and some other men was instrumental in having a large quantity of nitro-glycerine conveyed in trunks from Birmingham to London. There could not be a shadow of a doubt that these men were engaged in a conspiracy to promote explosions in London.

Another group was represented by Featherstone and Dalton. These again had set up, partly in Glasgow and partly in Cork, the machinery for the manufacture of explosives, and a not inconsiderable number of them were arrested with explosives and infernal machines on their persons. These were the men who caused the three explosions in Glasgow in June, 1883. Finally, there was the case of Burton and Cunningham. These men were shown in the early part of 1884 to have deposited bags containing infernal machines in the cloak-rooms of different London railway stations, and there can be no doubt whatever that they were actively concerned in the explosions on the underground railway at Westminster Hall and at the Tower of London.

As regards Daly, on which case Mr. Redmond centred his attention, the facts are as follows: Daly came over from America to Birmingham in October, 1883. He went to lodge with Egan, under an assumed name. He had no apparent occupation and he was closely watched by the police. He had plenty of cash and from time to time made journeys between Birmingham and Liverpool. Upon a certain day in 1884 he went to Liverpool, and the police lost sight of him for two days. When he was next seen he was on the Birkenhead railway station, and he had in his possession three infernal machines, and a large quantity of detonators and explosive material, but he was either unable or unwilling to give any account as to where he had obtained them. At his house in Birmingham were found a number of treasonable documents, and in his garden was found a tin canister containing documents and nine ball-cartridges and a bottle of nitro-glycerine, which he admitted at the trial he had placed there himself.

Mr. Asquith refused to make any concession whatever to the demands of Mr. Redmond and the Irish members. He commenced his speech by severely rebuking Mr. Chamberlain for recklessly charging him (Mr. Asquith) and Mr. Morley with prostituting the clemency of the Crown for political purposes, and he said Mr. Chamberlain ought to have repeated his statements in the House, where they could have been sifted. He most emphatically denied any compact with the Irish party in regard to the amnesty that had been made in some cases. As to the imprisoned persons, he had most carefully considered each of the cases, and had examined minutely every one of the allegations made by Mr. Redmond, and if he entertained a particle of doubt as to the justice of the sentences, he would have acted at once on that view. But in respect to all of them he was satisfied they were guilty, and he challenged the Irish members to assert their innocence. Answering the argument that they were political prisoners and not criminals, he asserted that the test was not the motive but the method of the crime. Finally, he said it was a painful duty to take up the position he had done. "It is far easier," he observed, "to be what is called clement and to let people out of gaol. But we have a duty to discharge which we are determined to discharge at all costs. For my part I say, both with reference to the past and if need be with reference to the future, persons who resort to this mode of warfare against Society, who use dynamite as their instrument, who proceed in their methods with reckless disregard of life, and the safety of the weak, the innocent and the helpless, are persons who deserve and will receive no consideration or indulgence from any British Government."

This was courageous language for a new Minister to use in reply to a party that held the life of the Government in its hands. The Irish members bitterly attacked Mr. Asquith, and they not only threatened to give the Government trouble in consequence of his speech, but also declared their intention to do all they could at the next election to unseat him in East Fife. They persisted in bringing the

subject before the House on several subsequent occasions, but despite their threats and abuse, the Home Secretary firmly refused to modify his attitude.

On the other hand, Mr. Asquith's vindication of his action made a great impression on Parliament and the country. His unflinching adherence to the principles of justice in face of the pressure put upon him, and the firm straightforward manner in which he dealt with his opponents, evoked praise from all quarters, and marked him out as a statesmen of strong convictions and high courage, who could be depended upon to safeguard the interests entrusted to his charge. When he resumed his seat at the close of his speech, the Unionists vied with the Liberals in their emphatic applause.

Mr. Balfour who followed Mr. Asquith in the debate said: "I rise merely for the purpose of expressing my hearty concurrence with the speech delivered by the Home Secretary, my hearty concurrence in the substance of the speech, and my great admiration of the manner of the speech. I am sure it has seldom fallen to the lot of any Minister of the Crown to make his first effort in this House under circumstances more difficult, and to come out of those circumstances with greater honour. The right hon. gentleman has shown himself a master of clear statement, a master of eloquence, and he has shown something far more—he has shown himself as a man capable of conducting the business of his office in a courageous spirit; and of explaining to this House without circumlocution and without ambiguity the principles upon which he has acted." *The Times* strongly approved the speech, and the *Daily News* remarked that "the total absence of passion or prejudice throughout what is certainly the ablest speech he has delivered in the House was the foundation of its strength and the effect it created. A most convincing speech stating irresistible reasons why clemency should not be extended to the Dynamiters." The *Spectator* in its comment said that "the event of the debate was Mr. Asquith's firm and admirable speech, which raised altogether the level of appreciation of his political character

in the House, and pointed him out as one of the most powerful of the future leaders of the Gladstonian party".

One of the incidents during Mr. Asquith's term of office, which excited at the time widespread interest, and assumed an aspect of great importance, was the fatal rioting that occurred in connection with the miners' coal strike in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

It would be uninteresting now to state at length the causes and details of the dispute and the riots, but a brief review of the chief features of the episode is desirable, as they provide material for forming an estimate of Mr. Asquith's qualities as a statesman. Some notice of the event is also necessary because of the violent and calumnious attacks made upon Mr. Asquith in the matter by the extreme Labour Socialist party. The most unscrupulous falsehoods regarding his motives, and the most audacious misrepresentations of his policy were circulated by his opponents, and a set organised movement by all the Socialist Democratic bodies throughout the country was put in force against him. Meetings which he addressed were interrupted by planned disturbances, and for a considerable time after the incident of the riots had been closed, he was assailed at political gatherings with inane and insulting cries of "Asquith the murderer," "Who shot the miners?" and the like.

On 20th September, 1893, attention was called in the House of Commons to the labour troubles in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Mr. Asquith, in his reply, said that it could not be laid down too clearly that the responsibility for the suppression of local disorder lay, where it had always lain from the earliest period of our history, with the local authority. He then gave a lucid exposition of the powers possessed by the Home Secretary in connection with local disturbances, and, referring to the disgraceful attacks that had been made upon him by the labour agitators, he said that certain hon. gentlemen had been going about the country circulating the ridiculous fiction that Her Majesty's Government deliberately sent down without warrant the armed forces of the Crown in order that they

might take the side of the coal-owners and crush the resistance of the miners. "Where are the men who made those statements?" he asked. "It was well known that the matter would form the subject of discussion. Why are they not in their places? It is a very easy thing," he continued, "to go about the country speaking to excited audiences where you are safe from refutation and reply; but it is a very different thing, and the only proper thing, to come to the House of Commons, face to face with the Minister you condemn, to fight the matter out. If the hon. members were present I should ask them what they would have done in my position. Supposing that they had held the office which I hold, and that the state of things which I have described had been brought to their knowledge; supposing that the local authorities, alarmed for the preservation of the public peace and for the safety of property, had sent them telegram after telegram saying that the local police forces were insufficient, that they had tried to borrow additional police elsewhere but unavailingly, and that unless special protection were given to them they could not be responsible for the public peace, what course would those hon. members have taken in the circumstances? These irresponsible critics know as well as I do, and would admit it if they cleared their minds and tongues of cant, that there is no sane man in this country who would not have acted as I have, and who would not have felt it his bounden duty to supply the local authority with such a force as in their judgment was necessary to supplement the local forces at their disposal. No one can deprecate more strongly than I do the employment of soldiers unnecessarily. I know that their employment in the performance of police duty is distasteful to the soldiers themselves, and for many obvious reasons it is undoubtedly irritating to the people."

In further justification of his action, Mr. Asquith pointed out that the result of the prompt measures taken was that within forty-eight hours of the time when the local forces were supplemented, the whole disturbance ceased. Adverting to the fatal result of the riot at

Featherstone, he referred to the fact that two different verdicts had been given by the two coroners' inquests on the bodies of the two men who were unfortunately killed. When these two verdicts were brought to his notice he immediately recognised that a serious question had arisen. But before taking any action, he thought it right to call for the evidence that had been taken at the two inquests, and to give it his most careful consideration. Having completed his study of that evidence, he had come to the conclusion that a number of facts bearing on the point at issue had not been investigated at all, and in justice to all concerned he had decided to institute a thorough inquiry into all the facts of the disturbance, so that the materials might be forthcoming for the formation of an authoritative and final judgment.

In conclusion in a peroration of noble eloquence, delivered with great feeling, he said: "This deplorable dispute has now been going on for the greater part of two months; it has involved the districts affected in widespread misery; it has engendered feelings of animosity easy to arouse but difficult to allay, and it has been productive of most disastrous results with respect to the general industries of the country. I trust, then, that it is not too much to express the hope that neither on the one side nor the other will there be a continuance of that unreasoning obstinacy, which I cannot but think is the main obstacle to the settlement of this great quarrel. Serious indeed will be the responsibility of those who persist in such a course. I believe I am expressing the unanimous opinion of all parties in this House and of the public outside it when I say that we rely on the moderation and good sense of those engaged in this dispute to put an end to it without delay."

*The Times* in its leading article accorded a thorough support to Mr. Asquith, and heartily approved his speech. "Mr. Asquith has once more shown," it remarked, "that though he is a keen party politician, he is governed by a high sense of responsibility in the exercise of his administrative duties at the Home Office. He confronted the

so-called members of the 'Labour party' yesterday, as he had repelled the attacks some months before of the Irish patriots, who demanded that an unconditional amnesty should be granted to the convicted plotters of dynamite outrage."

In October, 1893, Mr. Asquith again defended his policy in speeches which he made at Glasgow and East Fife. He indignantly repudiated the calumny that his action had been dictated by partiality towards the mine-owners. "I have maintained," he said, "and I will maintain, the strictest and most impartial neutrality between masters and men. Who can suppose that I, a Liberal Minister, a member of a Government which depends for its existence upon the support and the confidence of the great body of the nation, who can suppose that I had any temptation to be so false to my duty as to prostitute the forces of the Executive, and the forces of the Crown, to take the side of the employers in an industrial conflict? No; but there is one thing which neither I nor any other Liberal Minister worthy of the name will ever tolerate; the use of disorder, of lawlessness, or of riot, either upon the one side or the other. I do not care upon which side it is employed; I do not care who it is that instigates it, or who defends it. So long as I am responsible, not only to the Sovereign but to the people of this country, for the proper use of the executive forces which the law places at the disposal of the administration, riot and disorder shall not be allowed to prevail."

This firm declaration was received with a remarkable demonstration of approval by the meeting, which was largely composed of working men. Mr. Asquith repeated the opinion he had expressed in the House of Commons that the bulk of the miners, amid all the privations and trials to which they had been exposed in the dispute, had maintained an attitude of patience, and had done all in their power to discourage that fringe of lawlessness which was always to be found on the skirts of any great movement. Those miners, if they were miners, who had been guilty of acts of disorder, were, he said, traitors to their cause, and

he pointed out that it was to the interests of the workers to disassociate themselves from outrages and outbreaks that could only alienate public opinion, and deprive them of the moral sympathy of the country.

The Commission appointed by Mr. Asquith, on behalf of the Government, to inquire into the rioting at Featherstone was composed of Lord Bowen (Chairman), Sir Albert Rollitt, M.P., and Mr. R. B. Haldane, Q.C., M.P. It was universally admitted to be a tribunal that commanded the respect of all classes of the community, and one that was exceptionally well qualified for the work assigned to it.

The Commission opened its inquiry at Wakefield on 19th October, 1893, and after a most searching and exhaustive investigation, it issued its report on 6th December, 1893. The report was a clear and unequivocal vindication of the troops employed to put down the disturbance of 7th September. After succinctly setting forth the circumstances which led to the employment of the troops, and describing the exposed position in which the soldiers were situated, and the provocative violence of the armed mob which threatened them in overwhelming numbers, the Commissioners stated that the troops at Arklow Colliery were in a position of great embarrassment. By the withdrawal of half their number to preserve order at an adjoining colliery, they had become inadequate to maintain the passive defence of the colliery at night in the presence of a very violent and aggressive mob which had become defiant and uncontrollable. All efforts at conciliation had failed, and in fact had increased the audacity of the attack. The magistrate had made seven appeals, the Riot Act had been read without result, and a bayonet charge had been made without avail. Much valuable property was ablaze, and the rioters were doing their best to spread the flames. The little detachment of under thirty men was holding the Green Lane entrance of the colliery, against a mob armed with sticks and bludgeons, which refused to disperse, and which pressed wherever it could into the colliery premises, and kept up a galling fire of sticks, stones and iron bolts. Had the soldiers retired from their position, the colliery premises

would have at once been occupied by the mob in force. They would have been surrounded and rendered helpless, and the complete destruction of the colliery property would have ensued. To hold their position indefinitely against odds that were simply overwhelming so long as they remained passive was simply impossible. Some way out of the deadlock had to be found, and the Commissioners deliberately affirmed that Captain Barber and the troops had no alternative left but to fire, while Mr. Hartley, the magistrate, was bound to require them to do so. The Commissioners further expressed their sense of the steadiness and discipline of the soldiers under trying circumstances, and found no ground for any suggestion that the firing was conducted with other than reasonable care.

The report of the Commission was widely discussed and met with approval from John Burns, the sanest and most influential leader of labour, and *The Times*, the leading organ of Conservative opinion.

It is impossible to consider this episode of the Featherstone riots without being impressed by the high qualities of statesmanship displayed by Mr. Asquith. In his position as Home Secretary in a Government practically dependent on the support of the Radical Labour party, he had every temptation to avert hostility, by palliating the rioting that took place, and pursuing a weak and temporising policy. Instead of that, he unhesitatingly rose above all considerations of party advantage and personal popularity, and firmly and fearlessly executed what he conceived to be the duties of his high office. He proved that he was capable of acting in a sudden crisis of the most difficult character, with determination and courage, and with promptness and decision.

During the year 1893, while Mr. Asquith was Home Secretary, there occurred a number of industrial disputes resulting in numerous lock-outs and strikes. It is to Mr. Asquith's credit that he used all the influence of his position and availed himself of every opportunity to expose the wickedness and folly of resorting to industrial war as a means of settling industrial quarrels, and during these conflicts he again and again made powerful appeals to the

combatants to settle their differences amicably by arbitration. In one dispute he was himself directly instrumental as arbitrator in effecting a settlement, and in another he initiated a series of conferences that resulted in an agreement being arrived at.

His speeches on this subject are full of sound common sense, and have a practical ring about them that does not always characterise the comments of politicians on commercial affairs. Speaking at a dinner of the "Association of the Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom" on 14th March, 1894, he referred to the fact that during the previous twelve months there had occurred one of the most widespread and deplorable disputes that had ever arisen between capital and labour in this country. Into the merits of the question he said he would not enter; but of this he was certain, that there was not a man among them who looked back to those events without regretting that he had not ready to hand some machinery by means of which the combatants could have been brought together, and their differences more easily and speedily arranged or prevented. English trade was carried on under increasing difficulties, and the competition of our rivals was becoming keener and keener. These were not days in which the commercial classes of the country, whether employers or workmen, could afford to waste months of time and millions of money in internecine conflict which mutual common sense and forbearance might avoid. He referred to Lord Roseberry's successful interposition in the great coal strike, but he asked whether it was right to leave it to the accidental and casual initiative of a single individual to take steps such as those that were vitally necessary to the community at large. He was expressing the conviction of many, he said, when he stated that any Government, of whatever party, and any Parliament that could establish in this country a system of industrial arbitration corresponding with that in the wider sphere of international relations, would earn the blessing that was promised to the peacemakers, and would deserve well of this country and of the civilised world.

## CHAPTER VII

### MINISTER OF INDUSTRY

IN one of his speeches to his constituents in October, 1893, Mr. Asquith reviewed the duties of a Home Secretary, and after referring to various functions which he had to perform, he said: "Then, lastly, he is to a very large extent, so far as we have such a thing in this country, the Minister of Industry; all the factories and the workshops of the country, in England, Scotland and Ireland, are under his supervision, and are watched by inspectors who are responsible for making reports to him. The same is true of all the mines in the country, and in a hundred ways he is required, more and more, through one piece of legislation after another, to discharge the duty of investigating and improving the sanitary and the economic conditions under which the industry of labour is carried on. An office of that kind, so complicated and so various in its functions, taxes not only the energy but the will of any one called upon to perform it."

Mr. Asquith entered upon his duties with such enthusiasm and sympathy, and executed them with such energy and ability, that, by common consent, he left behind him at the end of his term of office the record of the ablest Home Office administrator of modern times. He did not spare himself in the slightest degree. Fortunately, the beneficent work before him was congenial, and he responded gladly to the exacting calls upon his time and ability. As he said in one of his speeches, he gave to his duties practically the whole of his time and his strength.

He revealed the wide scope and the almost unlimited opportunities for doing good that resided in the office of Home Secretary, which, before his sympathetic energy discovered and utilised them, had lain dormant and unfruitful. He stretched to their utmost limits his administrative powers for usefulness, and he brought to bear upon every detail of his duties a trained penetrative mind and an administrative genius, which stamped all his work as done by a master hand. Thoroughness and efficiency were characteristic of all his methods and actions.

The secrets of his success were his living sympathy, his intense interest in his work, his deep desire to ameliorate the condition of the helpless worker, and the fact that he never issued any set of rules, or put in force any policy, until he had thoroughly investigated his facts, and thoroughly mastered his subject. He proved himself emphatically the right man in the right place. Intellectually and constitutionally, Mr. Asquith was extremely well fitted in every respect for the work he had undertaken. His outstanding virtues of sound judgment and common sense were just the qualities needed to deal with the very practical problems arising out of the ordinary everyday life and work of the masses, which required exactly the type of man he was—hard-headed, shrewd, unsentimental, but sympathetic and kindly, and above all thorough, fearless and just.

Mr. Asquith first turned his attention to remedying those industrial evils and abuses that were susceptible to reform by increased administrative efficiency. Put briefly, his first object was the industrial betterment of those among the workers who were being unjustly treated, and who, being poor and unorganised, were the helpless victims of cruel greed. By his administrative authority he set himself to ensure healthy conditions of labour, and to root out the sweater wherever he could be found. He proved that under his somewhat cold exterior there burned fires of deep compassion and sympathy for the "white slaves of England". He was possessed by a noble determination to do all in his power to put an end to the vile atrocities of the sweater's den, and the accursed evils of excessive

child labour. And his self-sacrificing zeal for his less fortunate fellow-men found its reward in the incalculable benefits which he was instrumental in conferring upon the masters and workers, and therefore upon the whole industry of the country.

His keen sympathy revealed to him at once the immense good that could be done by a vigorous crusade against undue oppression of the workers, and he organised a system for the elevation and purification of the working conditions of the most obscure and helpless sections of the labouring classes. The prevalence of sweating, especially in London, was at the time of Mr. Asquith's entrance to the Home Office simply appalling. The lax administration of the Home Office under the two preceding Conservative Governments had been taken advantage of by that rapacious, but, it is to be hoped, decreasing class of employers who, in order to enrich themselves, are ever ready to wring the last drop of blood out of their workpeople, and who are prepared to force them to work amid surroundings unfit for beasts. Of all industrial evils, the evils of sweating are of the vilest and most horrible character. They reduce a human being almost below the level of a beast. They stifle all the nobler instincts and kill the very soul and spirit. The existence of their victim is in very truth a living death. They are a foul blot on our civilisation, and a disgrace to our statesmanship.

These abominable evils are, if possible, intensified when the conditions of the sweater's den are introduced into the home. The transformation of the dwelling-house from the scene of repose and rest to the scene of sweated labour is absolutely destructive of all the best attributes of home life. The vile hovels where the sweater's victim usually lives are wretched enough habitations without the scanty accommodation being lessened by the conversion of some of its rooms, or more often the division of the one room, into a workshop, and the introduction of unhealthy processes of labour, carried on under totally inadequate sanitary arrangements. Such a condition of things renders

impossible the proper sanctity and privacy of family life and all that home really means in the true sense of the word. Surroundings of such unchanging filthiness produce a frightfully depraved standard of living, which has its results in emaciated bodies, and in character dead to all that is pure and good, "without hope and without God in the world".

With this atrocious state of affairs Mr. Asquith dealt as promptly and thoroughly as circumstances rendered possible. In November, 1892, he put into operation an important, though, until then, little-known clause of the Factory Act of 1891. The order issued by Mr. Asquith required all occupiers of factories and workshops, and the contractors of labour employed by them, to keep a list of all their outworkers—that is, of all the men, women and children whose work was done in their own homes, and to have this list available for the examination of the factory inspector and sanitary officer.

This action of Mr. Asquith's was really, though not nominally, the first real blow struck by the State at the modern sweater. It is true that Mr. Matthews, the preceding Home Secretary, had, under strong pressure, but not until a year after the passing of the Act, issued an order requiring a list of outworkers to be kept by manufacturers of articles of wearing apparel. The order, however, as every one acquainted with the working of the Factory Acts knows, produced no effect. It was not properly circulated, no public attention was drawn to it, and practically the whole body of employers affected knew nothing about it. Now it is just in this respect where we find the great virtue of Mr. Asquith's administration. Everything he did was done thoroughly. His intensely practical spirit made the powers of his department a reality and not a sham. The order he issued was given the widest publicity possible, and every one concerned was made acquainted with it. Further, Mr. Asquith's order applied not only to the making of wearing apparel, but also to the manufacture of furniture and upholstery work, to electro-plating and to file-making, these additions cover-

ing most of the worst cases of sweating, apart from those in the tailoring trade and the chain and nail-making trades. All these trades abounded in small workshops, and a lot of the work was "contracted out" and done by the out-workers in their own homes—damp, foul, ill-lighted, insanitary holes, few of them, possibly, even known to the inspectors, and those few rarely visited, before they became the objects of Mr. Asquith's reforming zeal.

But it was no use issuing the order referred to without devising and putting into operation some machinery to ensure its effective enforcement. No doubt the majority of the employers would be prepared to honestly supply the information requested, but there would certainly remain a few who would try to evade the order or give misleading information, and these would be precisely the cases where sweating in its worst forms would exist.

Mr. Asquith was thoroughly alive to these facts. "Administration in these days," he said, in March, 1894, "is quite as important to the general interests of the community as the making of new laws. It is little use encumbering the Statute Book with a number of beneficent provisions unless the Executive, to whom the carrying out of these provisions is entrusted, is prepared to put them into effect with a free hand, and with a full determination to carry them to their legitimate and logical conclusion." And in October, 1894, he asserted that "the Acts of Parliament ought not to be a dead letter, but should be vigilantly enforced. . . . In the first place there ought to be statutory safeguards in every industry for the life and health of the workers; and in the next place adequate machinery for their constant and effective enforcement."

The reforms proposed by Mr. Asquith were announced at an important gathering of social reformers on 24th January, 1893.

After announcing his intentions regarding women inspectors (which are dealt with in subsequent pages) he turned to the question of the increase in male inspectors, and referred in appreciative terms to the action of his predecessor, Mr. Matthews, in increasing early in 1892 the staff

inspectorate from fifty-nine to sixty-nine. "But I very soon convinced myself," Mr. Asquith continued, "that although this was a step in the right direction, it did not go far enough, and that more might be done and must be done to bring the system of inspection abreast with the requirements of the country. I have accordingly devised a scheme which I propose to put in force at the commencement of the next financial year, the main features of which I will explain in a very few sentences. In the first place, I think our present system of factory inspection suffers very much from want of co-ordination and organisation. The inspectors make their reports to Whitehall, but in the country at large they have no common meeting-place; they are scattered and isolated units, and an immense amount of time and energy might be saved if provision was made for some few central places throughout the country, to which inspectors of the district might resort, where some part at any rate of their clerical work might be done for them, and where they might be brought from time to time into communication and contact with the representatives both of the employers and Trades Unions. I propose accordingly to establish in the course of next year, and this I trust only as an instalment, in three of our large centres—Glasgow, Birmingham and possibly either Leeds or Manchester—central offices, which will be offices for the whole of the districts over which the superintending inspectors have jurisdiction. To these offices, inspectors of the district will be able to resort. The officials of Trades Unions and federations of employers will know where to go for information or to make complaints; and further, I trust that the offices may be made the gathering-ground for a great deal of useful information in connection with labour and industrial disputes and matters of that kind, which may be of service to the labour department of the Board of Trade. The second change is an increase in the staff of inspectors. I agree with a great deal that has been said about the infrequency of the inspectors' visits, but the crying evils of our industrial system are to be found not so much in factories as in workshops. It is there where sweating as it is called goes

on. Workshops are to a very large extent at present beyond the ken of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Under the Act of 1891 orders have been issued from the Home Office requiring persons in a number of trades to keep lists of outworkers, in order to find out where the small sub-contractors live. But it is no use keeping these lists and finding out where the sweating dens are if you have not got a sufficient staff of persons to track them and see that offences against the law are not carried on day after day unknown and with impunity. I propose to appoint a new class of inspector-assistants, beginning during the present year by appointing fifteen inspector-assistants. They will be men who will not be subjected to the present inelastic conditions as to age or examination, but, of course, they will have to pass a sufficient test to show that they are fit for their duties. I hope to get for the purpose men belonging to the working classes—energetic, quick-sighted and practical—who know from their own experience the actual conditions of life in our factories and workshops. They will be under the supervision of the London inspectors, and eleven of them will be stationed in London, and the other four probably in Glasgow. It must not be supposed that I regard these measures as completely satisfactory, but it makes a very fair beginning towards what I hope will be a new and improved system of factory inspection." A most practical, business-like, well informed speech, showing a remarkably close knowledge of the details of factory life.

It is very gratifying to be able to state that Mr. Asquith's vigorous administration met with the cordial support of genuine social reformers irrespective of party. Even *The Times* conceded that "the Home Office was entitled to its due meed of praise for what it has done and is doing for the more effective administration of the Factory Acts".

Mr. Asquith's new scheme resulted in immeasurable benefits to both labour and capital; for the health, comfort and goodwill of the worker are the best assets of any employer, and the surest guarantee that he will get value

for his wages. Further, a thorough and enlightened administration of the factory laws is only just and fair to the best employers, because by this means the competition of the sweater is made impossible. Speaking on 20th October, 1893, only six months after the increased staff had entered upon its duties, Mr. Asquith was in a position to report that the fifteen new assistant inspectors, all of them working men, had not only given the greatest satisfaction by their zeal and assiduity, but had succeeded, in London particularly, in bringing to light a number of abuses, especially abuses of the nature of sweating, in the lowest class of workshops, which, but for their appointment, might have passed undiscovered and unremedied. Mr. Asquith added that he hoped in time to largely increase this class of public servants.

Another new departure which Mr. Asquith initiated in the methods of factory inspection, was the inauguration of a system of women inspectors. Looking back upon the subject now it seems an astonishing thing that such a system had not been introduced before. A very large proportion of employees in workshops and factories are women, yet when Mr. Asquith came into office there was not a single Government woman inspector throughout the United Kingdom charged with looking after the health, the hours of labour and the conditions of labour of the thousands of women workers in the country.

It is obvious, as Mr. Asquith repeatedly pointed out when defending his policy, that there are a number of things, particularly in relation to health, regarding which women cannot disclose their wants or the shortcomings of their surroundings freely and openly to men, or if they could, they would be very much indisposed to do so. The superior fitness, the natural instinct and insight of women for such work cannot be questioned by any one acquainted with the subject. As Mr. Asquith contended, "When you have got hundreds and thousands of women employed, often in unhealthy and sometimes in dangerous conditions, it is the height of folly that there should not be entrusted to their fellow-women, to some

extent, the duty of seeing that the precautions, which the law requires and humanity dictates for the safe conduct of their work, are vigilantly enforced".

A short time after his accession to office, Mr. Asquith said that since his official experience had given him a closer insight into the matter, he had become convinced that real genuine beneficial reforms in our workshops and factories were impossible without the assistance of women as inspectors. There was no field, he said, where they could be more usefully and more fruitfully employed than in looking after the health and industrial conditions in which their fellow-women laboured in factories and workshops.

Mr. Asquith first announced his proposals regarding women inspectors on 24th January, 1893, when deputations from the "Women's Trades Union Association of the East End of London," the "Women's Liberal Association," and other representative bodies of women workers waited upon him "to urge that women should be appointed as factory and workshop inspectors". In reply to the deputation, he said that this matter had engaged his anxious consideration from the moment he had held his present office, and he approached the question with a very strong prepossession in its favour. The experience gained on Boards of Guardians and School Boards of the advantages of female co-operation showed a strong case for enlisting women in the work of inspection so far as the women and children in our factories were concerned. There were many factories and a large number of workshops in which women alone were employed, and it was impossible for one who understood the difficulties of the case to suppose that there could be in relation to those very matters to which our system of inspection was mainly directed, free and frank communication between the female operative and the male inspector. In addition there was the intuitive and instinctive knowledge which, without complaint or inquiry, women necessarily have of the wants of their own sex, and there was the special keenness of sight and quickness of judgment with which in matters

of that kind the other sex was distinguished above man. Upon those grounds and others it appeared desirable to introduce the female element in our system of inspection. He had come to the conclusion that the difficulties which existed should be overcome, and he intended by way of experiment, "because," he said, "we must move cautiously in these matters and gain wisdom by experience," to appoint two women inspectors, who would receive £200 per annum rising to a maximum of £300. One of these inspectors would be placed in London and one in Glasgow, but they would not confine their attention to these two towns, but go about the country and make perhaps occasional surprise visits, in order to familiarise themselves and the Home Office with the real grievances of female operatives throughout the country. It would then be possible to develop the system of female inspection until it met the needs of the case.

This small beginning is characteristic of the anxiety displayed by Mr. Asquith on all occasions to avoid inflicting injustice, however strong his convictions were, in introducing new features into the industrial system, for he was well aware how delicate was the mechanism that held that system together.

This new departure was, however, abundantly justified by the results. The new inspectors entered upon their duties with such zeal and energy that they were instrumental in speedily effecting a very marked improvement in the condition of female labour throughout the country. The work done by the women inspectors was, in fact, so entirely satisfactory, and the results attained so significant, that six months after the first appointments, Mr. Asquith decided to increase the number, and he had to make further additions from time to time.

An instance of the great usefulness of women inspectors was given by Mr. Asquith in speaking on the "Factories and Workshops Bill" in the House of Commons, when he acknowledged their valuable services in an inquiry which had been undertaken, and also referred to the fact that in "reference to conventual

laundries the objection to the intrusion of men in such places had been removed by the appointment of lady inspectors".

By simple administrative reforms of the character described above, and by increasing the efficiency of his department in all its activities, Mr. Asquith succeeded in conferring incalculable benefits on British industry. In particular, Mr. Asquith stands out as the greatest benefactor female labour has ever known. As a result of his practical commonsense reforms and vigorous administration, thousands of women workers have been raised from foul and degrading conditions of labour with excessive hours, to comfortable, sanitary and well-lighted factories with reasonable times of employment.

Mr. Asquith recognised that for the effective carrying out of a comprehensive movement for the amelioration of the workers, it was necessary that all the agencies working for this object should co-operate and render each other all the mutual assistance possible. In a speech of great power and eloquence, made at the London Reform Union on 26th December, 1892, he made a statesmanlike appeal for this purpose. After admitting the great importance of factory inspection, and the inadequacy of the present staff, he said: "Yet however largely you increase and render effective the system of central inspection, you cannot lift more than a finger to get rid of this gigantic social evil (sweating) unless you can enlist in co-operation with the officers of the central authority, the various local authorities of London and the County Council. To carry out the provisions of the law; to prevent women and children being employed at times, and for hours which the law does not sanction; to secure that in every workshop in London the ordinary conditions of decent human existence shall be observed—to carry out that great object you will need the constant co-operation and the harmonious action of the factory inspectors representing the Home Office, of the School Board Officers and School Attendance Committees, who alone can get upon the track of children who are being improperly employed, and last, but not

least, of the Medical Officers of Health and the Sanitary Inspectors of the Vestries and the County Council. And it is only by the united, intelligent and harmonious action of the central and local powers that you can bring about the attainment of a result upon which all social reformers ought to be and are, I believe, united—I mean, securing for those who carry out during long hours, hard and irksome toil, at least that the conditions under which they labour shall be fit for human beings and not for brutes merely."

Further results of Mr. Asquith's activity at the Home Office, which were fraught with far-reaching benefit to all concerned, were his reforms in regard to dangerous trades. He organised the investigation of this question with characteristic ability and thoroughness and with a determination to gain a first-hand knowledge of the actual state of affairs which would enable him to deal effectually and justly with the evils that required remedying.

An efficient inquiry had the result of convincing Mr. Asquith that there occurred in our industrial system a very large amount of preventible loss of life and injury to the health of the workers, and while recognising the high standard of humanity of many employers, he felt it was not sufficient in a matter such as this to rely solely upon individual initiative and energy to deal with the great problems involved. At the same time, he saw clearly the difficulty of dealing with the matter by legislation, and he therefore gave the whole subject the very closest and most careful attention, and called to his aid all the expert opinion obtainable upon the question.

In a speech to his constituents on 21st October, 1893, he gave a lucid exposition of his powers and intentions regarding the matter. The Home Secretary, he said, had power by an administrative order to make special rules where he was satisfied that a trade was of a specially dangerous nature. It was impossible to read even in the most cursory way the accounts in the newspapers of accidents and inquests, without being aware of the fact that in a number of industries in this country the workers were exposed to

daily risks not merely to their limbs but to their health, to their bodily condition, and even to their lives, which by the exercise of a little care, forethought and humanity might and ought to be avoided. At the same time, it was an extremely difficult matter to interfere with. There were industries very difficult for an outsider to understand and very dangerous to tamper with, and therefore it was not enough to prove that in a certain trade there existed undue unhealthiness and undue mortality. Before grappling with the matter effectually and successfully it was necessary to possess a thorough understanding of the peculiar conditions under which the business was carried on.

Accordingly, he considered it advisable to select four dangerous trades—the pottery trade, the manufacture of chemicals, the manufacture of white lead, and the industry of quarrying—which appeared on the whole to require the most urgent attention, and he appointed to investigate the condition of each a special committee of factory inspectors, chemists and others specially qualified for the work. These committees travelled about the country inspecting the industries with which they were concerned, taking the evidence of both masters and men, and seeing with their own eyes the conditions under which each particular trade was being worked. It was upon the reports of these committees that Mr. Asquith acted with, as far as could possibly be arranged, the common consent of both masters and men.

In a speech to a deputation of masters which waited upon him, Mr. Asquith said that he did not approach the subject in a spirit hostile to the employers, or with a desire to force his own views upon them. On the contrary, he believed that special rules of this kind, if they were to succeed, must succeed, not because they could in the last resort be enforced by penalties or by courts of law, but because they secured the co-operation of masters and men.

A brief review of the steps taken in regard to some of the trades selected may be of interest. The manufacture of white lead occupied a first place among the dangerous trades demanding their toll of human suffering

and human life. The reports made by the Commissioners appointed by Mr. Asquith revealed a horrible state of affairs, and they asserted that many of the deaths and much of the injury to health caused by existing conditions were preventible.

On the 14th March, 1894, Mr. Asquith met a powerful deputation of pottery manufacturers and members of Parliament for the purpose of discussing with them the new special rules he proposed for the industry they were interested in. The Home Secretary said he was satisfied from his information that the pottery trade required special rules, and he did not believe that any of them would deny it, because although it might be true that there were well-managed factories carried on by gentlemen with capital, who could afford to give effect to their humane feelings, yet, on the other hand, there was in this trade, as in most trades, a residuum of employers who, either from want of will or want of power, did not take precautions which, having regard to the extremely delicate and dangerous character of the industry, ought to be taken in the interests of the health of the workpeople. Any one who had studied the statistics of disease in the Potteries knew that at this moment there was a very large amount of preventible disease of the most serious kind involving constant illness, and in some cases shortening life, and any one who had charge of the administration of the powers given under the Factory Acts would be guilty of a gross neglect of duty if he did not in such a case do everything in his power to put an end to that which the deputation deplored as much as he did. He was satisfied there was a case for declaring the manufacture of china and earthenware to be a dangerous industry, and an abundant and ample case for laying down rules as to its conduct. He had been told that these regulations would drive capital out of the country; but that prophecy had been made fifty years ago with respect to the inspection of factories and the shortening of the hours of labour of women and young persons, and it had proved untrue. The administration of the Factory Acts had been carried on with the

reasonable application of capital and with an enormous improvement in the life of the workmen. At the same time, in dealing with a particular industry, they could not be too careful in laying down rules to see, in the first place, that they did not go beyond the special necessities of the case, and, in the next place, that they were rules of a sufficiently elastic kind to adapt themselves to a very large variety of conditions, even to the factories and workshops in any particular industry. The deputation, Mr. Asquith observed, considered the rules too stringent and not sufficiently elastic, and the men thought they were grossly deficient in stringency and far behind the recommendations of the committee. He hoped they would meet again in conference with a view to a satisfactory settlement.

Happily, Mr. Asquith was successful in arranging a set of rules and regulations acceptable to both masters and men, which have considerably reduced the injurious effects to health incidental to pottery manufacture. This success certainly ranks both in point of difficulty, and in point of the immense benefits conferred, as one of the greatest achievements of Mr. Asquith's administration.

The same happy result attended Mr. Asquith's intervention in the Belfast linen industry. The fearful mortality in this trade seemed to have escaped public notice, and it was not until Mr. Asquith sent down an expert to investigate the conditions that the fearful dangers and awful results of the work were realised. Mr. Asquith's Commissioner reported that the hot damp atmosphere of the workrooms, poisoned with the waste product arising from the linen manufacture, undoubtedly set up consumption, and was responsible for the high death-rate among the linen workers. Mr. Asquith's recommendations were acted upon with commendable promptitude by the linen manufacturers of the north of Ireland, and the necessary improvements, entailing the expenditure of several thousands of pounds, were carried out simply on the instructions of the Home Office, and without any Act of Parliament.

Similar measures were taken in regard to the Sheffield grindery trade, the manufacture of chemicals and the in-

dustry of quarrying, and in all these trades highly beneficial improvements acceptable to all concerned were effected.

It is interesting and significant to note that in all the comments made upon the record of the Liberal Ministry of 1892-95, when it resigned office, there was a striking unanimity of appreciation by all parties of Mr. Asquith's great administrative work at the Home Office. It was generally conceded that he had been the pioneer of a new spirit in administration, and that he had devoted himself with a whole-hearted zeal and energy to his duties. He astonished the permanent officials at the Home Office by his exceptional powers of organisation, the thoroughness of his methods, and his remarkable capacity for work.

Mr. Massingham, one of the most brilliant of modern journalists, in the course of an article in the *Sketch* on 24th January, 1894, wrote that "his career as Home Secretary had been an extraordinary success. Mr. Asquith saw that the Home Office—a lightly worked but important department—presented opportunities for the higher kind of statesmanship, and when they were lacking he created them. Before he had been in the Home Office three months he had revolutionised the relations of the Home Office to industrial law, had solved the Trafalgar Square problem, and had given triumphant evidence that he was both strong and clement. That he has completely established his position, that he has brought Mr. Gladstone's Government many recruits, and that both his administrative and legislative work are first-rate, are fresh testimonies to the kind of fortunate genius that presides over his life. But with all his triumphs his speech on the Dynamiters question revealed a higher kind of capacity than had been suspected in him. It was a speeeh as good in form as has ever been heard in the House of Commons, and it revealed a personality with a steady and vital flame behind it. That impression Mr. Asquith has never lost, and he is not likely to forfeit it by any act of his own."

The important feature of Mr. Asquith's work at the Home Office is its permanence. His record is not

one merely of political eloquence—expressions of sympathy with social reform and promises of political action. His record is one of substantial achievements conferring solid and lasting benefits on the industrial community. No politician of modern times has entered more sincerely and thoroughly into the work of genuine reform, and no statesman has done more than Mr. Asquith to better the conditions under which the working classes perform their labour. There are hundreds and thousands working to-day under fair and healthy conditions in our factories, who owe their release from the fever-infested dens of the sweater to his sympathetic and vigorous administration. He has purged our industrial system of many foul and blighting influences that existed when he entered upon his duties as Home Secretary, and his great reforms have rendered the life and health of the workers far more secure than they ever were before.

In particular where women were employed and a system of sweating prevailed, he made the eye and hand of the law felt with a new force, and he very sensibly abated the abominable abuses of child labour. For these reforms alone his name deserves to be held in lasting remembrance by the working classes, as that of the statesman who by his great ability and invaluable sympathy inspired a new spirit into factory administration, and initiated a process of industrial betterment that will work out not only for the good of the workers of to-day, but also for that of all future generations.

In respect to physical well-being, Mr. Asquith's reforms have conferred an incalculable benefit on the whole community which should never be forgotten. The improved health and moral character of the labouring classes, resulting from their more wholesome environment when at work, must have its effect in raising their own physical condition and that of their children, and thus be of benefit to the whole race. Mr. Asquith safeguarded the continuance of his beneficent work by establishing the splendidly organised system of inspection to which we have referred, ensuring by this means not only the effective execution of

the law in existing industries, but also the discovery of any fresh evils that might arise from new processes of labour and new methods of manufacture.

A striking appreciation of Mr. Asquith's work, characteristically original in conception and able in execution, appeared in Mr. Stead's monthly magazine, the *Review of Reviews*. The following extract serves to show how deeply Mr. Asquith's work had impressed competent observers: "What we are witnessing at the Home Office under Mr. Asquith is a phenomenon practically identical with the revival of religion in the Christian Church. There is a great outpouring of the Divine Spirit which urges men to seek and save those who are lost, a renewal of the gift of the Divine grace of compassion which, working in the hearts of His followers, stimulates them to fresh exertions for the purpose of carrying out the great work of the Church—the salvation of men. All this social unrest, all this craving for the application of new methods to secure the poorest and weakest against oppression and disease—this attitude of quickened attention which strains the ear to catch the moan of the injured child or the sweated toiler—these things are the notes of the revival of civic religion, which has in Mr. Asquith and his colleagues at the Local Government Board and the Board of Trade its most conspicuous official exponents."

## CHAPTER VIII

### LABOUR LEGISLATION

THE greatest legislative effort on behalf of labour that distinguished Mr. Asquith's career at the Home Office was the Employers' Liability Bill, which, after receiving the approval of the House of Commons, was so mutilated by the House of Lords as to render it unacceptable to the Liberal Government. It was not therefore carried into law.

The Second Reading of the bill was moved by Mr. Asquith on 20th February, 1893, in a lucid, powerful and exhaustive speech, in which he gave a most luminous and comprehensive exposition of his proposals. He described the bill as an attempt to settle on lines which were broad and simple a long-standing controversy, in the adjustment of which both the employers and the wage-earning classes were equally interested. He stated that it abolished altogether the doctrine of common employment. The principle on which the bill was founded was that, where a person for his own profit set in motion agencies involving risks to others, he ought to be civilly responsible for the consequences. If the bill passed, the employer would still be at liberty to raise the defence of contributory negligence, while with reference to the defence of acquiescence expressed in the legal maxim, *volenti non fit injuria*, and in view of recent decisions in the Courts on the subject, there was re-enacted a clause of the Act of 1880 to the effect that where the workman knows of defects in the machinery, and where having the opportunity of bringing them to the notice of his employer, or some person superior to himself,

he fails to do so, he ought to be regarded as not in a position to make the employer responsible. This was subject to the provision that the omission of the workman to give notice to the employer did not disentitle him to recover if he knew that the employer was aware of the defects. After making careful inquiries, he announced that the Government had come to the conclusion that, for the future, a general prospective agreement by which the workman could contract himself out of his statutory rights once and for all, ought to be prohibited. If the House believed that the remedy given by the Act was required by justice and public policy, it was only proper to make the rights of the workmen inalienable and indefeasible. Then there was a new definition of the word "workman" so as to include seamen in British ships, and lastly, Mr. Asquith called attention to the great changes made by the bill in immensely facilitating the procedure for the recovery of damages, by assimilating an action under it in all respects similar to an ordinary County Court action. He expressed his readiness to modify any proved injustice in his proposals, and in conclusion, said that he trusted the satisfactory solution of a question would be reached, which, he hoped, was now removed beyond the range of party controversy, and in the settlement of which all parties were equally interested. This hope was speedily endangered, for at the close of the Home Secretary's speech, Mr. Chamberlain rose to move an amendment to the effect that no alteration in the law relating to employers' liability would be final or satisfactory which did not provide compensation to workmen for all injuries sustained in the ordinary course of their employment and not caused by their own act or default. Mr. Asquith described this amendment as unpractical and merely an academic opinion in favour of a general system of industrial insurance.

On 5th May the bill was sent to the Standing Commitee on Law, which deals with a measure in greater detail than is possible in the full assembly of the House of Commons. Mr. Asquith displayed great tact and skill in his conduct of the bill through the Committee stage, being

firm on essential matters of principle, but conciliatory on points of minor importance. He accepted many amendments, and when the bill emerged from the Committee, he acknowledged the substantial improvements that had been effected in it, and said that he had never sat on a committee which approached the consideration of a grave and serious subject in a more practical spirit and with better results. Sir Edward Clarke spoke of the measure at this stage as a substantial improvement in the present law, and as having much approval on both sides of the House. The majorities in favour of the bill in the divisions during the report stage averaged out at the splendid figure of 103.

The most critical point in the progress of the bill on the report stage was reached on 8th November, 1893, when an amendment was moved by Mr. McLaren and seconded by Mr. Cobb, both Liberal members, to except from the operations of the bill, provided certain conditions were fulfilled by the parties concerned, the insurance fund arrangements in vogue between employers and their workpeople. The chief and most important case in question, and the one round which the discussion really turned, was that of the London and North-Western Railway Company. The mover and seconder of the amendment both entirely disavowed any desire to wreck the bill, the main objects of which they cordially approved, but they contended that the bill would destroy the existing fund arrangements and replace them with a state of things less favourable to the workpeople.

Mr. Asquith, with his usual generosity and absence of ill-feeling, said that the two hon. members had presented the case of the London and North-Western Railway Company with singular ability and moderation. He then proceeded in a convincing speech to reply to the arguments put forward. He pointed out that the London and North-Western Railway Company gave their contributions to these funds because they had good business reasons to do so. These reasons, he reminded the House, would exist exactly in the same force when the bill became law as they did now, and these reasons being admittedly the real con-

sideration for the contributions, it was absurd to argue that the insignificant outside liabilities, which would be enforced by the men under the bill, were sufficient to justify the discontinuance of the employers' contributions to these funds.

On 23rd November the bill came before the House for its third reading, and Mr. Chamberlain in a lengthy speech attacked it as unwise and mischievous legislation, denouncing the contracting-out clauses, but stating his intention, nevertheless, to vote for the third reading.

Mr. Asquith opened his speech with a severe criticism of Mr. Chamberlain's opposition to the measure. He dealt in detail with the objections put forward, condemning the contradictory and illogical nature of Mr. Chamberlain's contentions, and ridiculing his position in denouncing the bill as mischievous and yet giving it his vote. Mr. Chamberlain asserted in his speech that the Home Secretary had taken the bill from the Trades Unions, had declined to accept reasonable amendments of it, and had forced it through with the aid of the Irish vote. "The truth was," Mr. Asquith replied, "that there has been no bill of recent years with regard to which the Government had accepted a larger number of amendments from every quarter of the House." As the bill applied to Ireland, the Irish members were fully entitled, he said, to be heard on a matter vitally affecting their country. As a matter of fact, however, there had been only one amendment on which the votes of the Irish members had affected the result.

Continuing his speech, Mr. Asquith said that by assimilating the position of the workman to that of the stranger they were simply carrying to its logical conclusion the long-settled and well-recognised principle of English common law. For instance, in the case of a railway company, a single act of negligence on the part of any one of the 60,000 employees of the London and North-Western Railway Company exposed the company at the suit of third persons to damages to the extent of thousands of pounds. That, he said, was admitted to be a just and politic state of the law and no one proposed to change it.

But why should the workman be differentiated against? Why should he not be put on the same footing as a stranger?

"This bill," he continued, "though I do not represent it as a complete or final measure, makes a large and most substantial improvement in the position of the workman. It abolishes the doctrine of common employment, and places the workman on the same footing as a stranger in relation to risks from negligence. It declares on the face of an Act of Parliament that which has hitherto been at the outside a mere matter of doubtful legal decision—namely, that a workman entering into and continuing in an employment is not held by that act alone to have voluntarily acquiesced in the risks of that employment. The bill also provides that whenever employment is carried on under conditions which involve risk of injury to health, it shall be the duty of the masters to take reasonable precautions to obviate or mitigate those conditions, or if he does not take those precautions he shall be liable. It gives the workman, again, in regard to sub-contracting, a protection which he has hitherto greatly needed, in making it impossible for an employer to delegate to a man of straw the liability which the law casts upon him and which he ought to bear. It does not prohibit any voluntary arrangements between master and men, but it does prohibit all contracts whereby a workman prospectively relinquishes for all time to come the legal rights secured to him by Act of Parliament. Again, it enormously simplifies the procedure by abolishing the notice of action and by getting rid of the maximum of damages which a workman can recover; and finally, it widely extends the scope of the existing law by, for the first time, providing a satisfactory definition of a workman, which will bring under the protection of the law, not only servants of the Crown and our seamen, but every class of men in Great Britain who work under contract of service and are paid wages. These are large and liberal changes in the law, which we believe will not impose on the employer any unreasonable or excessive burden, because they only recognise and give effect

to obligations which humane and enlightened employers already observe." The speech constituted a masterly exposition of the objects of the bill, and a crushing reply to Mr. Chamberlain's objections. The third reading was eventually carried without a division, and the bill was sent up to the House of Lords.

On 20th December the bill came again before the House of Commons for consideration of the Lords' amendments. The first and most important amendment was to the effect that contracting out of the provisions of the bill should be permitted in cases where the workmen obtained compensation from a mutual insurance fund, so long as the said fund observed certain conditions set out in the amendment.

Mr. Asquith had already emphatically declared in more than one public speech that the Government could not compromise on the question of contracting out, and he rose at once to move that the amendment be disagreed with. In a powerful speech, which aroused his party to repeated demonstrations of enthusiasm, he vigorously criticised the action of the Upper House, and riddled the arguments put forward in support of the amendment. He pointed out first that the very conditions which it imposed upon a scheme for providing compensation out of an insurance fund showed that an individual workman could not be trusted to exercise freedom and secure his rights in making such a contract. It was absurd to suppose, further, that the Treasury could guarantee the solvency of the insurance funds. The amendment, he considered, was extraordinarily crude and ill-conceived. Mr. Asquith then referred with considerable effect to a parliamentary by-election then impending at Accrington, and emphasised the fact that the Conservative candidate when pressed by the electors had pronounced against allowing contracting out. The Government, he asserted, had a clear mandate from the people to adhere to the bill, and this was confirmed by the fact that in a great industrial constituency like Accrington both candidates had pledged themselves against the contracting-out proposals contained in the

Lords' amendment. "Are we in this House," he said, "going to accept at the dictation of another place a proposal which even a Tory candidate, appealing to an industrial constituency in Lancashire, does not venture to support? We are not. We regard the acceptance of this amendment as fatal to the bill, and we ask the House to disagree with the Lords' amendment."

Mr. Asquith's declaration of no surrender evoked a storm of cheering from the Liberal benches, and he sat down amid a perfect hurricane of applause. There could be no possible doubt of the enthusiastic approval given by the rank and file of the party to his action. Mr. Chamberlain supported the Lords' amendment, but in the division the House rejected it by a majority of sixty-two, a result which was received with great satisfaction by the supporters of the Government. Those Liberals who had at one time shown a qualified opposition to the contracting-out clause of the bill, now voted with the Government, as they considered the Lords' amendment went far beyond their proposals. Other amendments made by the Lords were agreed to.

All efforts to arrange a compromise on the contracting-out question resulted in failure, and on 20th February, 1894, Mr. Gladstone announced the decision of the Government to drop the bill by moving "that the order for the consideration of the Lords' amendments to the Employers' Liability Bill be discharged". The Prime Minister said that there was a good maxim that half a loaf was better than no bread, but it was inapplicable in the present instance, inasmuch as the amendment adopted by the Lords could not be considered apart from its general bearing on the whole framework and substance of the bill.

Mr. Asquith, who, on rising, received a great ovation, said that in due time the Government were prepared to take the opinion of the country on the action of the House of Lords in this matter. In the opinion of a large majority of the working classes, the clause inserted by the Lords would place the liberty and independence of the workmen at the mercy of the worst class of employers, against whom

the bill was aimed, and would enable them to take away from the men the very benefits which, if the bill had passed in its original form, it would unquestionably have conferred. He laid the whole responsibility for the loss of the bill on the House of Lords, for by their mutilation of it they had rendered it unworthy of acceptance by the working classes.

After the great amount of time and labour he had expended on the bill, both in drafting it and in carrying it with infinite tact, skill and patience through the House of Commons, it must have been a very galling and bitter disappointment to Mr. Asquith to see all his work rendered futile by the action of an unrepresentative body utterly unfitted in every way to deal with the question. With hypocritical sympathy the Liberal Unionists and so-called Democratic Conservatives professed deep regret at the loss of the bill, but the genuine Tories, and especially the unscrupulous section among the employers, hailed its fate with undisguised satisfaction. Among Liberals a strong feeling of resentment was aroused, and an even fiercer bitterness was shown by the working classes at the contemptuous indifference to their opinions shown by the House of Lords.

Considered from every reasonable point of view, the action of the Lords in regard to this bill is utterly indefensible. By every consideration for their position as the professed instrument of the matured and well-considered will of the people, they ought to have acquiesced in the demand for the withdrawal of their amendment. On all sides it was made evident that the electors were strongly against their proposal. Deputation after deputation waited upon Mr. Asquith for the purpose of voicing the opposition of labour to the meditated alteration of the bill, and after the Lords had proposed their amendment, and Mr. Asquith had rejected it, the working classes again emphasised more strongly than ever their intense hostility to the proposed changes. Not only so, but the vast majority of the electors were undoubtedly opposed to the House of Lords in this matter, and if it had been possible then or

since to have taken the opinion of the electorate on this single issue there is every reason to believe that it would have emphatically pronounced in favour of the bill remaining intact. The experience at Accrington was evidence of this.

But, as has been the case with every Liberal measure ever submitted to them, the Peers allowed themselves to be carried away by partisan feeling and by a selfish consideration of their own interests, which were then, are now and always have been, opposed to the interests of the people and especially to the interests of the working classes. The question is sure, sooner or later, to become a living issue again, and when it does, labour will be reminded of the affront and injury it received by the destruction of Mr. Asquith's great measure.

Happily all the work on legislation for social reform expended by Mr. Asquith was not destined to be nullified by the House of Lords. By a remarkable combination of tact, energy and skill, he succeeded, in the most difficult circumstances, in placing one great measure of social reform on the Statute Book.

For some considerable time before he introduced the Factories and Workshops Act to Parliament, Mr. Asquith had plainly intimated that he purposed bringing forward legislation of this character, and he had foreshadowed the general principles on which he intended to proceed. With his scrupulous fairness, he had told both masters and men alike that the measure would not give any consideration to class interests as such. While the Government had, he said, no intention of introducing legislation that would be harassing or unreasonable to any trade, they were determined first to compel all employers to conform to the conditions to which good employers spontaneously and voluntarily conformed, and second, to make reasonable provision for the prevention of the evils and abuses of child labour, and the excessive labour of young persons. At the same time, he recognised that it was just and necessary that the Government, in carrying out these reforms, should give careful consideration to the special

circumstances that affected particular trades. To ensure this, Mr. Asquith instituted the most exhaustive inquiries, and made the most searching investigations, before drafting his bill; and his proposals were prepared with a comprehensive knowledge of the actual conditions of the industries affected.

Mr. Asquith first brought his bill before the House of Commons on 30th April, 1894, but it was not proceeded with further until 1st March in the following year, when he again introduced it, and in a clear and very interesting speech explained his proposals. "The bill has been framed," he said, "in accordance with the spirit which has uniformly animated the whole of our factory legislation." It was now proposed to extend the existing law and to make provision for some cases with which the law, in its present shape, did not attempt to deal. In the first place, the Government having come to the conclusion that it was desirable to lay down a statutory definition of overcrowding, it was provided that in all factories and workshops there should be a minimum of 250 cubic feet of space for every person, and 400 cubic feet for every person during overtime. Further, the Secretary of State was empowered to add to this minimum in hours during which artificial light was used. The law prohibited children from cleaning machinery in motion, and this prohibition was extended to young persons. Another clause provided that the Court of Summary Jurisdiction might, on the application of an inspector, order movable fire-escapes to be kept in factories where the inmates were not sufficiently protected from the danger of fire. Again, in the case of dangerous machines, the Court of Summary Jurisdiction might, on the complaint of an inspector, order the premises to be put in proper condition. Mr. Asquith gave a detailed description of the technical provisions for simplifying and amending the law with regard to accidents, and observed that under this head it was asked that power should be given to the Secretary of State to direct that inquiries be held by experts into all accidents occurring in factories or workshops. Other

clauses of the bill dealt with outwork, with the object of preventing existing abuses and ultimately penalising the giver out of work if he continued to send it to insanitary places. As to home work, which Mr. Asquith said was a peculiarly noxious form of overtime, that was prohibited for children and regulated for women and young persons, so as to secure that no person protected by the law should work during the twenty-four hours for a longer time than the law at present permitted. The bill contained no proposal that the age at which children should be employed should be raised from eleven to twelve years, because it was thought such a provision would excite determined opposition from both the masters and the men in the textile trades, and for good reasons it was most desirable to make this a non-controversial bill. If, however, there was a general disposition in the House to insert the age limit of twelve years in the bill, the Government would be only too glad to have their hands forced in that way. The bill brought under the Factory Acts for the first time, laundries, bakehouses, docks, wharves, quays, building operations where machinery was employed, and tenement factories. The bill also extended the provision as to the payment of pieceworkers in the textile trades in respect of what was known as the "particulars clause," which was made applicable to all textile workers, and was made more specific. Textile factories, in which a great deal of humidity was engendered by the operations of the trade, were brought under conditions analogous to those in the Cotton Cloth Act of 1889, and it was provided that in workshops and factories where wearing apparel was made, the temperature should be not less than sixty degrees. Special provisions were inserted with regard to places where arsenic and other poisonous substances were used, and lastly, it was proposed that all the workshops in the country should be registered. At the close of his speech Mr. Asquith expressed the hope that the objects of the bill would be a matter of equal concern to all parties.

The speech was followed by a desultory discussion in which a general approval was given to the proposed re-

forms. The press was more decided in its approbation, *The Times* generously praising Mr. Asquith's efforts, and other Unionist journals expressing favourable views. To the Liberal party the measure gave unbounded satisfaction, and the genius and skill displayed in its preparation were appreciated by all shades of opinion. It was recognised by Conservatives and Radicals alike that in the construction of his bill and in his exposition of it in Parliament Mr. Asquith had shown a complete mastery of his subject, and had given unquestionable evidence of his great qualities as a constructive statesman endowed with remarkable ability for getting at the root of an evil, and dealing with it in the most effective manner.

The portion of the bill that raised the greatest controversy was that relating to laundries, but no part of Mr. Asquith's defence of his bill was more convincing than that which he devoted to this section. Speaking on the second reading on 22nd April, he said: "We have instituted a very far-reaching inquiry, extending over the whole country, as to the condition of laundries, an inquiry which was carried on largely by lady inspectors. That inquiry has brought to light facts that were only suspected before, both with regard to defects from sanitation, danger from machinery, and risks from the excessive humidity of the atmosphere. In all of these particulars, a state of things almost incompatible with civilisation, certainly with the whole spirit of our factory legislation, has been disclosed. It cannot now be disputed that laundries generally should come under the Factory Acts, and all that is now claimed is that certain classes of laundries should be treated exceptionally." With reference to conventual laundries, Mr. Asquith pointed out that the objection to the intrusion of men had been removed by the appointment of lady inspectors.

During the progress of the bill, Mr. Asquith had to deal with many deputations from the various interests affected, some urging that the provisions of the bill should be extended and made more drastic, and others that its proposals should be restricted and modified. The main

principles of the bill, however, secured general approval from all quarters, and Mr. Asquith received numerous encouraging evidences of support.

The bill came up for its third reading on 3rd July, amid peculiar circumstances. During the Committee stage, the Government had been defeated in the House on the Cordite issue, and had resigned office, and a provisional Conservative administration had superseded it and was carrying on the affairs of the country. The bill, however, remained under the care of Mr. Asquith, and with consummate tact he piloted it through the House, and it was eventually read a third time without a division. On 6th July, it received the assent of the House of Lords, and was passed into law.

Another bill of great value to labour, introduced by Mr. Asquith, was his measure to amend the Truck Acts. In presenting the bill to the House of Commons on 2nd March, 1895, he said it was not denied that the working classes suffered under a grievance regarding the deductions from their wages in respect of fines, tools, and matters of that kind. The present state of things, he said, imposed great hardships on those affected and especially on the most helpless sections of the workers. The remedy proposed by the bill was that any contract between a workman and his employer for any deduction from his wages should be illegal, unless such contract was in writing and signed by the workman, and unless it was a contract that could be considered reasonable in all the circumstances of the case. The enforcement of the provisions of the bill would be placed in the hands of the factory inspectors.

No further progress was made with the bill before the downfall of the Liberal Government, but its main features were afterwards embodied in a measure introduced by the succeeding Government. The new measure received Mr. Asquith's hearty support, and was eventually placed on the Statute Book.

## CHAPTER IX

### SOCIAL REFORMER

DURING his tenure of office as Home Secretary Mr. Asquith lent the great weight of his authority and influence to the support of all sane and earnest efforts towards the progress of true social reform. He never has been, and by the constitution of his character never can be, a ranting extremist. While fearless in his support of changes which he is convinced are just and necessary, and unselfish in his services to the causes in which he believes, he recognises that it is worse than useless to thrust upon the electorate great and far-reaching reforms, the necessity for which it has not been fully educated to understand. His zeal for reform and progress has been demonstrated too often to be doubted by any one. His whole political career has been animated by a great ambition to improve the condition of the people. But he accepts the fact that this must be done, and can only be done, by the consent of the community at large. Because a certain reform is desirable, it does not necessarily follow that it is to the true interests of progress to propose legislation upon it. A long course of education and enlightenment is necessary before the nation can be persuaded that a subject is ripe for legislative treatment, and until that stage is approached it is rendering a disservice to any reform to attempt to thrust legislation concerning it upon the country.

Mr. Asquith's aim has always been to apply common-sense remedies to the woes of common humanity, without doing any injustice to any class of the community. He

has been firm in declining to associate himself with hasty and ill-considered changes, and has always deprecated any disposition to "rush" social reform. While, on the one hand, anxious to confer benefits on the workers, he has, at the same time, never forgotten that this must be done without unfairness or injustice to the employers. Social reform to him must be fully justified on the grounds of equity and justice as well as of expediency.

His support, therefore, when it has been given, has been valued as that of a statesman distinguished for the sanity and clearness of his judgment, and for the sincerity and fairness of his views.

One of the first subjects directly affecting the happiness of hundreds of workers to which Mr. Asquith gave attention during his Home Secretaryship was the excessive length of working time required of shop assistants in large towns. On 21st March, 1893, he spoke on a resolution, moved by Sir Charles Dilke, to the effect that the local authorities should be empowered to make the closing of shops compulsory, in accordance with the freely expressed vote of the majority of the shopkeeping class in any district.

Mr. Asquith said that he had strong sympathy with the object of the resolution. The evidence was overwhelming and conclusive that in a large number of retail establishments the persons employed were occupied for a number of hours far in excess of what was compatible with the conditions of decent and respectable existence. It was clear that in a large number of cases men and women were employed eighty and eighty-four hours a week in occupations which, if not physically exhausting in the sense that manual labour was, yet were destructive, when prolonged, of physical, mental and even of moral health. The evil being admitted, the only queston was: What was the most appropriate and effective remedy? It was said that there was no evidence that voluntary combination would not be effective for the purpose. Undoubtedly voluntary combination had proved an effective force for the attainment of a half-holiday on Saturday in London

and the large provincial towns. But the difficulty to be dealt with in this matter arose from the isolated action of selfish persons who would not bring themselves even into line with the great body of their own class, and who were totally insensible to the operations of public opinion. Mr. Asquith instanced the case of the hairdressers in London, in which, owing to the obstinacy of a single large employer of labour, an arrangement to close at 4 P.M. on Saturday had, after a few months' working, to be altered to 6 P.M. Thus, through the selfishness of one man, hundreds were deprived of two hours' recreation. It was astonishing how small a proportion of shopkeepers could effectively coerce a whole body into adopting longer hours than were either necessary or healthful. Benevolent efforts among customers had proved unavailing to solve the difficulty, and he had become convinced that some force more effective than public opinion would have to be used to achieve the object in view. After complimenting Sir Charles Dilke on his exertions in connection with the subject, Mr. Asquith said that he was not in favour of the proposals in the two bills which he (Sir Charles Dilke) had previously introduced requiring all shops in the country to be closed at 8 P.M. on five days in the week and at 10 P.M. on the other day. That appeared to him to lay down a hard and fast rule, the enforcement of which would necessarily lead to friction and inconvenience. On the other hand, he welcomed very heartily the terms of the present resolution, because the rt. hon. baronet, instead of laying down, first of all, a general rule for the whole country, proposed that the initiative should be a local initiative, and that in the first instance the shopkeeping community in a particular place should indicate in some unmistakable form its wishes in the matter, and thereupon the local authorities were to carry out those wishes. He did not in the least fear that under those conditions any substantial or permanent injustice would be done to any class of the community.

Subsequently, on 30th July, 1894, Mr. Asquith said that he would be only too glad to give the question of

excessive shop hours legislative treatment as soon as an opportunity offered.

Another reform of great importance to the artisan classes which he strongly supported was the Miners' Eight Hours Bill. In connection with this matter we may note first of all Mr. Asquith's strenuous support of the inauguration of an eight-hours' day in all Government works, a reform instituted by the Liberal Government of which he was a member.

Speaking at Berwick on 28th March, 1894, he said: "If there is one aspiration of the working classes which deserves the sympathy and, so far as it can get it, the practical support of all reasonable and humane men, of all others, it is the aspiration, I will not say of higher wages, but of shorter hours. Long hours are uneconomical from a purely industrial and pecuniary point of view. They mean that the working man goes to his work before he is fit for it, and that he continues at it after he has ceased to be fit for it, and the result is that the workman does not produce in the long run from lack of energy and lack of initiative the maximum amount of which he is capable. By short hours I am not speaking of anything excessive or extreme, nor am I laying down any hard or fast rule as applicable to all employments; but as short hours I take a sample of the general kind of average of what is now called the eight-hours' day, which represents, according to the experience of those who have tried it, the maximum time during which the human being, regarded as a human being, can carry on his efforts and energies for the best possible advantage both to himself and the community. I am perfectly confident that that result, allowing as it does the workman to enjoy home life, social life, and the more refined pleasures of literature and culture for so many hours each day, will not be found inconsistent with the interests of the taxpayer, because the taxpayer will get quite as much, and probably more for his money than he ever did before."

On 25th April, 1894, Mr. Asquith supported the

second reading of a private member's bill in favour of an average eight-hours' day for miners. He frankly explained that the Government had not proposed legislation on the subject because, although the majority of the members of the Government were in favour of such a measure, some were opposed to it. The question, he said, was one which divided both political parties. No one had demurred, he remarked, to the proposition that eight hours underground was as long a period as was consistent with a healthy existence, and that the majority of miners were in favour of a statutory limitation of their hours of labour. He contended that experience in Durham and the North of England, showing that ceaseless agitation during a large number of years had only succeeded in reducing the hours of labour for boys underground from eleven to ten hours, conclusively proved that voluntary organisation was insufficient for the object aimed at in the bill. Replying to the argument that the State ought not to interfere with the labour of grown men, he said that the whole history of factory and mining legislation showed that this principle had been repeatedly adopted with the best results. He pointed out that the majority of the mines of the country had adopted the eight-hours' principle, and had found it come out with the best results in practical working. The second reading of the bill was carried with a majority of eighty-seven votes.

Another reform of which Mr. Asquith has been a life-long supporter is that of temperance, but it cannot be said that any of the remedies put before the country have had his whole-hearted and unqualified approval. He gave a general support to Sir William Harcourt's Local Veto Bill, but was of the opinion that it would need supplementing. He has also expressed himself in favour of the principle of the Gothenburg system, though he is unable to accept it at present as a practicable and workable solution of the drink problem for this country. He considers that it would be dangerous to propose legislation founded on the principle of the Gothenburg system before it has been

experimented with on an extensive scale and on a comprehensive basis by one of the large municipalities of this country. Other points connected with the system which he considers need elucidation are the form in which, or the scheme by which, the municipality is to console the publicans for what it takes from them; and the principle on which, when the municipality has acquired the traffic, the trade is to be conducted. He points out that if the method adopted was to lower the prices for liquor, drinking would be stimulated, and on the other hand if prices were raised, there would probably be such a decrease in consumption as would entail a considerable loss in carrying on the business.

This latter is scarcely a convincing objection, for in addition to the diminution of working expenses corresponding to the decrease in business that would be made, there is also to be considered the great inestimable relief to public expenditure that would result from a substantial reduction in the alarming and greatly increasing sums that have now to be spent annually in making various provisions for dealing with the awful moral and physical results of the present widespread evils of excessive drinking. One other difficulty pointed out by Mr. Asquith is the disposal of the profits by the municipality. He thinks that if these went to the relief of the rates, an incentive would be given to drinking, and if they went to the Imperial Exchequer, the stimulus to the local authority to successfully prosecute the work would be withdrawn.

Mr. Asquith, however, does not contend that the objections he puts forward and the difficulties he points out are insuperable, and many will think that they are capable of being adjusted. There is undoubtedly a great body of opinion favourable to the municipalisation of the drink traffic. It has had the support of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Chamberlain, the two most prominent democratic statesmen of our time, and it remains as the one remedy which would sweep away the political power of a trade monopoly that is full of menace to the social and political well-being of this country.

Mr. Asquith has again and again urged upon temperance reformers the solid fact, unpleasant as it is to all earnest temperance workers, that it is impossible to legislate on a a great social subject such as this in advance of public opinion. It is foolish to ignore the lessons of the last forty years. If Mr. Chamberlain's proposals for the municipalisation of the drink traffic had been accepted when he first entered Parliament, this "greatest of all social curses," this "swollen tyranny," this most powerful of all the obstacles to progress and reform would not now exist in anything like the strength it does to-day, and an infinite amount of misery and evil would have been averted.

As regards the present phase of the liquor question, Mr. Asquith takes the same ground as he occupied in 1893. He is resolutely opposed both to any interference with the discretion of the licensing justices and to the payment of compensation to a dispossessed licensee out of public funds. In December, 1903, he said: "I will never consent to any measure that in any way fetters the discretion of the licensing authority acting in the interest not of a class but of the community at large". And speaking to his own constituents in October, 1894, he declared that "any proposal to apply public money to the compensation of the publican, who, after all, in this country, is no more than the holder of an annual licence, on the footing that he is entrenched in a secure monopoly, will receive the most determined opposition from the great mass of the people".

Mr. Asquith is, however, disposed to consider favourably any well thought out scheme giving some solace—he refuses to accept the word compensation because it has no legal standing—to the dispossessed publican, so long as the money required is provided exclusively by the "Trade". It is to be hoped that Mr. Asquith will yet be able to give this supremely important subject of the reform of intemperance that thorough consideration which he has devoted to other subjects, notably the condition of labour, for there is no statesman better qualified to propose legislation upon it calculated to receive the support of the

country at large, and to achieve results acceptable, as a substantial beginning, to all reasonable and practical students of the question.

A subject on which Mr. Asquith's attitude has been freely criticised by members of his own party, who find in him a perfectly satisfactory exponent of their views on other questions, is that of women franchise. It is, however, a question that divides opinion irrespective of party, and Mr. Asquith is not alone among Liberals, and Liberals of the most democratic views, in opposing it.

Speaking in the House of Commons on 22nd April, 1892, he said that although he thought it was a most mischievous proposal he did not share the gloomy forebodings of those who thought it would lead to the speedy and complete disintegration of the social fabric. Eminent women, he observed, were much divided on the subject, and the great mass of women were unconcerned and uninterested. There had been no case, he pointed out, of a previous extension of the suffrage to persons who were not capable of actually performing the duties, bearing the burdens, and liable to the calls of active citizenship. Such a proposal would make women equal with men in determining the domestic and Imperial policy, but it did not cast upon them, because nature did not permit it, the burden of the personal defence of the country. Further, there had never been a case of an extension of the suffrage where there was no practical grievance to complain of, and he challenged any one to cite a case during the last thirty years of any provable injustice to women in the legislation of Parliament. The appropriate sphere for women, he argued, was not in the turmoil of politics, but in the world of social and domestic life, and if they were drawn away they would be weakened in that respect.

Mr. Asquith has repeatedly drawn attention to the many anomalies of our electoral system, and he has advocated a liberal measure of registration reform. The three chief points he has insisted upon are: the shortening of the period of qualification, which at present annually disfranchises a large number of capable electors; the prevention

of the unfair use of the lodger franchise, which now admits freely to the register men who happen to be wealthy and well placed from a social point of view, at the same time excluding less fortunate men equally well qualified, however, for the exercise of their electoral rights; and, above all, the prohibition of any one, whatever might be the number of his qualifications, exercising more than one vote.

Mr. Asquith has been a consistent advocate in season and out of season of the taxation of ground values, and has strongly advocated the endowment of local authorities with powers for the compulsory acquisition of land for public purposes. Speaking on the 4th May, 1892, in support of Mr. Haldane's "Local Authorities (Purchase of Land) Bill," Mr. Asquith said that this bill would enable the local authority to deal with the case of a comparatively small but growing town, the land of which belonged to a single person, who for some reason or other would not sell the land at all or only on his own terms. Was it right that private property in land should be carried to such a length that the whole growing life and development of a community should rest upon the decision of a single man? The owner would receive full value and compensation for disturbance. Referring to the subject of the "unearned increment," he said the landlord at present appropriated the whole of the increased value of land which he had done nothing to create, and it was only fair that this unearned increment should go to the community.

He has attacked the Unionist Government on several occasions in Parliament for their neglect of this great question, and their opposition to all efforts to accomplish it. On 10th February, 1899, during a discussion in Parliament he said that this reform was one of the greatest urgency as the vital and essential interests of the community were at stake. Whereas, he has pointed out, owners of land could hold it back in order to obtain an increased price for it, the land being unoccupied contributed nothing to the rates, though the enhanced value of the land was invariably due to expenditure out of public money. What was wanted was to give urban authorities greatly increased powers for

the compulsory acquisition of land. There should also be established a system of municipal taxation, under which it would be possible to make great public works, and to throw an appreciable and just burden on the owner of the soil.

Speaking on a measure introduced into Parliament by Mr. Trevelyan on 11th March, 1904, Mr. Asquith said that such a bill, supported as it was by nearly two hundred urban rating authorities, proved incontestably that the policy of the taxation of land values was perfectly practicable. The bill embodied two principles, namely, that land should be rated at the real value, and that there should be a separate assessment of land and buildings. He admitted that there arose a serious difficulty in regard to this separate assessment, but he pointed out that the bill contained the actual process by which that object could be carried out, and that the unanimous opinion of places so widely separated and so diverse in their social and economic conditions as Glasgow and Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield, Bradford and Dublin, was that this was a practical measure. The present system of rating, he contended, was utterly indefensible and was inflicting great injury on progressive communities all over the country.

Addressing the members of the Land Law Reform Association on 17th March, 1903, he said that we were face to face with a growing depopulation in the rural districts, and a growing congestion in the urban districts, and side by side with these two processes we had what at first sight appeared to be a paradox. In both urban and rural districts there was overcrowding and huddling together of human beings, and a lack of those decent facilities of accommodation for purposes of social and domestic life without which it was impossible for individuals or communities to lead a rational, humane, or civilised existence.

It was a fact, and he would say a most scandalous fact, that the condition of things over a large part of the country had not improved since the days of the Labour Commission some twelve or fourteen years ago, and it was perfectly clear, that, as regards the rural districts, the miserable accommodation provided for the labouring

classes was, to a large extent, responsible for the depopulation that existed. There was a constant demolition of existing cottages, and none were built to take their place. It was perfectly clear that the very existence of an improved sanitary code had made the housing problem far more difficult than ever it was before, for sensible officers, if they did their duty, were obliged to report that many of the cottages were utterly unfit for human habitation, with the result that they were compulsorily closed, and the poor inhabitants ejected. The landlords would not, speaking generally, build cottages, because it was a class of property which it did not pay to invest in, and for the same reason this was not a profitable field for the speculating builder. Clearly, therefore, this was a case where the community should step in, and the duty of the community to do so had been recognised by the legislation of 1890 and 1900. That legislation had, however, been woefully ineffective, and largely so because the action of the representatives of the community was too much fettered.

Proceeding, Mr. Asquith said that private and voluntary effort was totally inadequate to deal with the question, and in any legislation he advised a simplification of authorities and concentration of responsibilities, an extension of the compulsory powers of the local authorities, greater elasticity in the terms of repayment of loans, and the raising of the land limit to one acre. Dealing with the question of site values, he said it would be generally agreed that land profited more than any other form of property from the growth and general progress of the community, and their first proposition was that the community had a perfect right to resort, for the support of its common burdens, to a source of wealth which its own existence and its own progress had created and enhanced. Then there was the glaring injustice which arose from the practical exemption from local rating of uncovered land. They all agreed with the recommendation of the Commissioners that a site value rate should be levied in respect of all uncovered land which could be let with an immediate covenant for building. Unless we could secure for our population,

both in the country and in the towns, the possibilities of a decent home, we might educate our children as much as we liked, and still leave unsolved one of the greatest social difficulties that ever faced this country.

Among Trades Unions and workmen's organisations generally, a great feeling of disquietude has arisen during recent years owing to certain decisions in the Law Courts affecting their power and liabilities, and especially by the verdict given in the action over the Taff Vale dispute. It is natural that Mr. Asquith's great interest in all that concerns the status of the working classes should have led him to give particular attention to these events, which formed the subject of several of his public speeches. On 6th February, 1902, in an address devoted solely to this question, he said that the last step in the direction of giving to Trades Unions and employers' federations the right and power of combination was taken twenty-five years ago. Looking back upon the experience they had had since, he did not suppose there was any sane politician in this country who would not agree that the change in the law, recognising the right of free combination, had been a wise and beneficial change in the interest of the employer, of the workman, and the community at large. From the point of view of the community the advantage was still more manifest. When an industrial war was actually declared in the form of a strike or lock-out, although the conflict took place on a larger scale than in days gone by, it was much more wisely and humanely conducted by organised bodies than by free lances, pursuing a kind of guerilla warfare. Experience had shown that the recognition of the right of free combination had made largely for industrial peace. Whatever were the drawbacks in the working of those combinations, those drawbacks were incident to the abuse, and not to the use, of the right of combination, and he, for his part, was convinced that that right was a right which the State in its own interest ought to safeguard and protect. However surprising the decision in the Taff Vale case was, he saw little prospect of its being set aside by Parliament. The common sense of the com-

munity, which sooner or later found expression in Parliament, would not easily be convinced that an association of persons, whether technically incorporated or not, wielding great powers and controlling considerable funds, should not be legally answerable for the conduct of agents acting under their authority. The real difficulty from the workmen's point of view created by that decision lay in the application of the law of agency and of the law of conspiracy. The central governing body of a great trade combination, however determined it might be that its action and the action of those it represented should be kept within legitimate limits, had great difficulty in directing and controlling, often at great distances, the conduct of every one who could be said to be the agents of the central authority. That difficulty in the administration of the law ought to be given effect to on grounds of justice, because nothing could be worse for the community than that Trades Unions should abandon their authority over trade disputes. The consequence of this would be spasmodic outbursts, ill-judged and ill-controlled, accompanied by lawlessness—a revival, in short, of the *régime* of industrial anarchy. As regards the law of conspiracy there was no doubt as to the duty of the Legislature to intervene, and it was time for Parliament to intervene. He was far from saying it would be easy to draw up an Act of Parliament, which would be perfectly plain to the man in the street, but there were three small propositions that ought to govern all legislation in the matter. The free power of effective combination, which Parliament, after a long and careful inquiry had deliberately allowed, must not be allowed to be destroyed or whittled away. A clear line of demarcation ought to be drawn between legitimate pressure and violence or any form of violence, and whatever rule was laid down the same rule must be applied to all trade combinations, whether employers or employed.

On 8th May, 1903, Mr. Asquith delivered a speech in Parliament in support of a bill introduced by Mr. Shackleton, a Labour member, with the object of "legalising the peaceful conduct of trade disputes and

amending the law of conspiracy". Mr. Asquith said that it was incontrovertible that both the Royal Commission and the Legislature had intended, thirty years ago, to legalise picketing provided it was carried out in a pacific spirit. It was intended by the clause in the bill not to bring about a new state of things, but to restore the effective exercise of a right which had been greatly interfered with by recent decisions. Even if the clause was passed as it stood he did not think it would be held by the Courts to legalise any form of picketing which would be in the nature of a nuisance. With regard to the question of combination he said that after the experience of fifty years the effectual exercise of the right of combination had been found to be the only satisfactory alternative to industrial anarchy, and if the exercise of that right were made dangerous it was a move not in the direction of industrial peace, but industrial war. The right of combination had been largely encroached upon by recent decisions, and that encroachment was, in his opinion, fraught with very great danger.

Mr. Asquith gave a practical proof of his views on the right of trade combination by moving a vote of censure on the Unionist Government for their inaction in reference to the Penrhyn Quarry dispute and lock-out, one of the most regrettable and saddening episodes in the industrial history of our country. Mr. Asquith's speech was full of human sympathy and wise counsel. He said he would raise no general issue as between socialism and individualism or between capital and labour, but he would speak purely from the point of view of the public interest, keeping in mind the reserved hope that the debate might lead to a settlement. "H. W. M.," an ardent democrat and labour sympathiser, in his parliamentary notes in the *Daily News* commented on the speech as follows:—

"One thing, however, may be said with safety of to-day's debate. It could not have been initiated with greater skill of phrasing, with more conspicuous mastery of the art of parliamentary persuasion than was shown in Mr. Asquith's introductory speech. It is some time since Mr.

Asquith has given the House and his party the full fruit of his notable gifts. No such complaint would lie against his effort to-day. I do not know how many votes it affected : I am certain it turned many men's opinions. Its arrangement was admirable—indeed, well-nigh perfect, and it was a pleasure to witness the firm, orderly march of its ideas and the skill with which they were made to converge on the parliamentary situation. It was very moderate, very careful to avoid the statement of large premises, the making of sweeping public committals. But it was a presentment of remarkable force, wanting the element of passion, but exhibiting nearly every other gift the parliamentarian can acquire."

## CHAPTER X

### HOME RULE AND MR. GLADSTONE

IN the fierce controversy that has raged over the Home Rule question, Mr. Asquith has, since he entered Parliament, taken a prominent part. His views have been clear and unmistakable. He has never fenced with the momentous issues presented, nor has he recanted any of his opinions. His attitude throughout has been consistent and courageous.

It was solely and specially on the question of Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy that he first came forward as a parliamentary candidate for East Fife to oppose the sitting Liberal member who had withdrawn his allegiance to Mr. Gladstone on account of the Home Rule Bill. He opened his election address to the constituency with the words: "I appeal to you as a hearty supporter of Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy," and he devoted practically the whole of his address to the same subject. The election was a straight fight upon Home Rule, and the issue was as specific and as clear as could be desired. His remarkable victory was, therefore, specially welcomed by the Liberal party and by Mr. Gladstone.

Mr. Asquith never failed to keep the question of Irish policy before the electors, giving it considerable attention in all his speeches. He was one of the most insistent in urging Mr. Gladstone to lay before the country, well in advance of the 1892 election, specific proposals instead of a general policy, for he was confident that the wisdom and justice of Mr. Gladstone's policy would be appreciated by the nation.

At the general election of 1892, Mr. Asquith's address contained a vigorous paragraph on Home Rule. He described it as of paramount urgency, but said that it could not be allowed to absorb the whole attention of the legislature. The claim of Ireland to legislate for and administer her own concerns was, he wrote, "nothing more than a demand for the application to a particular and most urgent case of the principle of self-government and the method of devolution. The real security for permanent political union between Great Britain and Ireland is perceived to lie in the indissoluble community of their social and political interests."

When the Home Rule Bill appeared, Mr. Asquith's name was found on the back of it as one of the strongest and most vigorous supporters of Mr. Gladstone's proposals. The bill came before the House of Commons for its second reading on 7th April, 1893, but Mr. Asquith did not intervene in the debate till the 14th. In anticipation of his speech, the House was crowded in every part. All the chief political leaders were in their places, and the galleries were filled to the utmost with eager and expectant visitors.

Mr. Asquith said that he desired to deal only with the main features of the controversy, and he would put aside at once the argument founded upon the supposed incapacity of the Irish people, under any conditions whatever, to enjoy and work free institutions. If that assumption was correct what were they to think of those who only a year ago proposed to give these same people a whole system of local institutions, flimsy and ill-constructed as they were, but quite sufficient to afford a formidable vantage-ground for the disloyal instincts alleged against the Irish people. Turning with unusual animation on Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Asquith rebutted the charge that the bill handed the Government of Ireland over to a body of unscrupulous and discredited leaders of the Nationalist party. The rt. hon. member for West Birmingham, he said, who apparently could not find more profitable employment for his energies, had been scavenging in the dust-heap of the

speeches of the Irish members, and had gleefully pieced together phrases dropped upon Irish platforms in moments of exasperation and despair. "Does he need to be reminded," asked Mr. Asquith, "that in 1885, and as late as the beginning of 1886, he was the author of proposals to entrust to these very men and to their leader, Mr. Parnell, the position of Chief Secretary for Ireland?" Continuing, Mr. Asquith said he would endeavour to answer the three main controversies involved in the bill. "First," he said, "is the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament maintained? Next, does the bill give to Ireland a real and genuine autonomy? And, thirdly, do we offer adequate safeguards for the protection of the Irish minority?" He declared that he entirely adhered to his former statements that no measure of Home Rule would be satisfactory that did not maintain unimpaired, unquestioned and unquestionable the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament over all persons as well as over all matters whether local or Imperial. The unimpaired supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, he pointed out, was clearly declared in the preamble of the bill. Digressing for a moment to the question of the retention of the Irish members at Westminster, he remarked that the bulk of the Liberal party regarded this as being vital to the bill, though, in his own opinion, it was comparatively unimportant whether they were to be allowed to vote in that House on all questions, or only on Imperial or Irish questions. Under the bill, the Imperial Parliament would have the continued and unimpaired power of legislating for the whole Empire, including Ireland. Moreover, Ireland would, through her representatives in the House of Commons, have a continued and adequate share of control over all the excluded subjects—army, navy, customs, trade and foreign relations. The restrictions in the bill were, Mr. Asquith explained, with one or two important exceptions, all to be found in the constitution of the United States. The Government believed in the common sense and self-interest of the Irish people, and these, indeed, constituted the ultimate security for the safe and smooth working of the bill. With regard

to the position of Ulster, he observed that she refused and repudiated separate treatment, and her preposterous claim was that, because she objected to Home Rule, the rest of Ireland should not have it. Referring to Mr. Balfour's visit to Ulster, and to his speech approving resistance, he said, "I am quite aware that these are the conditional excitements of an academic anarchist".

In concluding his speech, he asked what had been the cause of the decay of empires. "It was," he said, "the failure to develop local organisation, to meet the wishes and the functions of local life. It had been the choking of the centre and the wasting of the extremities, with the result that the whole became congested, paralysed and decadent." "It is this catastrophe," he continued, "which we wish to avert from ourselves. I yield to no one in my zeal for the maintenance intact and unimpaired of our great empire. With all the blots that stain its history, with all the faults and shortcomings in its actual working, I believe, as strongly as any one can, that it is the greatest civilising instrument which the political genius of man has yet devised. . . . But it lives and acts, and can only live and act by the free and spontaneous co-operation of all its parts. That is the test of a standing or a falling empire, and it is in that spirit and for that purpose that the bill has been framed." "Seven years ago," he said, in his eloquent peroration, alluding to Mr. Gladstone, "my rt. hon. friend the Prime Minister appealed to the people of Great Britain to make the cause of Irish self-government their own. That appeal was made by a man who had already given a full life of industrious service to the State; it was to a democracy, young, ardent, newly emancipated, feeling that it had for the first time within its reach social and political aims of its own upon which its heart was set. Such an appeal required on the one side the surrender of honourably earned repose, and on the other side the postponement of large and long-cherished hopes. Sir, those sacrifices have been gladly made, sacrifices worthy of a great cause; sacrifices which history will record, which posterity will honour. Of them this measure

is the fruit. For them, if it brings, as we believe it will bring, contentment to Ireland, honour to great Britain, added strength to the Empire, it will be the ample and abounding reward."

Mr. Asquith resumed his seat amid enthusiastic and prolonged cheering, that testified to a great oratorical and intellectual triumph. The rare ability of the speech received general recognition. It was a striking, eloquent, but above all closely reasoned vindication of the bill, and a telling, damaging, effective reply to its critics. *The Times* commenting on it said, "The main interest of yesterday's debate is to be found in the speech delivered by the Home Secretary. Mr. Asquith is a clever man and a practised advocate, and he made, perhaps, as good a case for his clients as any one who has yet spoken on the same side." Other Unionist journals were equally generous in their personal references, one of the most eminent, after describing the speech as a masterpiece, stating that "Mr. Asquith was the only man in the Cabinet who could have made such a speech".

To the Liberal party the speech naturally gave great satisfaction. The "special representative" of the *Daily Chronicle* gave a detailed and vivid description of it, and voiced the general feeling concerning it. He referred to it "as a remarkable effort," which in many ways completed and fortified the speeches that had preceded it in the debate. He described it as an "unbroken success". He said: "Mr. Asquith always succeeds. He has the knack of it. But I doubt whether any one expected the great controversial effort, remarkable above all for its powers of lucid arrangement of very complicated material. The arguments on which he chiefly relied have been used before in the debate. But they have never appeared in so compact a form and so orderly a march of ideas. The delivery was perfect, far more dramatic than Mr. Asquith's usual strong, level method, and went with a free play of fancy that came out with delicious effect in the serio-comedy of the parody of Mr. Balfour's Ulster speech." Referring again to the manner of the speech, the writer stated that

"Mr. Asquith's delivery was very good—few and simple sentences, straight pose, the hands pressed to the side or lightly grasping the box, clear, metallic voice and the utmost decision of phrasing. But the feature of the speech was its masterly management of a great body of hostile argument. Very noticeable was the open challenge to Mr. Chamberlain. Already the member for West Birmingham must be dreading the coming power of the young statesman whose criticism is tipped with a special caustic whenever it touches the ex-Radical leader. For Mr. Asquith has that dread force on his side which Mr. Chamberlain has not, the force of culture."

One aspect of Mr. Asquith's position in the Home Rule controversy is worthy of being specially emphasised. He was regarded as the "strongest supremacy man in the Cabinet," and he never lost an opportunity of enforcing his opinion that it was of vital importance that the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament should be adequately safeguarded, but he was equally emphatic in asserting his profound conviction that it was so safeguarded in Mr. Gladstone's bill. Speaking in Committee on the bill on 8th May, 1893, he said that the Government were as determined as any member of the Opposition could be that when the bill was finally passed, "the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament should be amply and unequivocally safeguarded".

Whatever shade of politician one may be, and whatever views one may hold of Mr. Asquith's opinions on Home Rule, all alike must admire the vigour and eloquence with which, when the bill was impending, he insisted on the most ample provisions being made for securing the unquestionable supremacy of the Imperial Parliament; and all must acknowledge, also, both the ability and the sincerity of his support of the measure as one that would strengthen and not weaken the unity of the Empire.

Another phase of the Home Rule controversy with which Mr. Asquith was prominently identified, was what was known as "Home Rule all round". At Oxford, on

9th June, 1889, he said that "Irish Home Rule must be presented to the country as the first step in a process of devolution and delegation, which must sooner or later be applied, not necessarily in the same form, to the other parts of the United Kingdom". "This was the true way," he contended, "of combining Imperial union with local liberty." He had, he said, no desire to hurry the question and he recognised that it was one on which the country would require a long education, and that it would be most unwise to precipitate an issue. But he believed that, sooner or later, as he told his constituents in October, 1893, "the process of devolution would have to be resorted to, so that the Imperial Parliament could be relieved, step by step, of a great mass of purely local affairs which it at present transacts with all the disadvantages of limited time and of imperfect knowledge".

Mr. Asquith has continued to advocate these principles through good and ill report. But there is no disguising the fact that, throughout England and Scotland, Home Rule has lost ground from the time of its rejection by the House of Lords. The revulsion of popular feeling which set in against the Liberal party was specially intense in its antagonism to Mr. Gladstone's bill. The full power of the combined Conservative and Liberal Unionist forces in Parliament, in the country and in the press, was exerted to its uttermost with untiring energy and great ability for the purpose of destroying any possibility of Home Rule ever being received again with favour by the British electorate. And the fact stands to-day, whether we like it or not, that the British people are convinced of the unwisdom of the Home Rule policy as put forward by Mr. Gladstone. That conviction may or may not be due to misrepresentation: the point is that it is deeply embedded in the minds of the great mass of the people, and in a democratic country such a consideration cannot be ignored, and ought not to be ignored, especially by the party that "believes in the people," and whose first principle is the principle of democratic Government.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there has existed for a considerable time in the ranks of the Liberal party a feeling that Home Rule should not be allowed to indefinitely bar the way to the concentration of the energies of the party on those questions of social reform to which it is deeply committed, and on which they can more confidently challenge an issue with the Unionist forces. This situation has been rendered all the more piquant and interesting by the gratuitously offensive fashion in which the Irish party through several of its leaders has not only asserted its entire independence of the Liberal party, but has also disparaged the services rendered to its cause by its old allies, and cast reflections on the sincerity of the convictions of the Liberal leaders on the question of Home Rule. The recriminations that followed on Lord Rosebery's "predominant partner speech" have never quite ceased, and have at times been accentuated, especially by the action of the Irish party in supporting the various education bills that have been put forward by the last two Unionist administrations.

Mr. Asquith's speeches at the time of Sir W. Harcourt's and Mr. Morley's retirement from the counsels of the Liberal party were looked forward to at the time with exceptional interest. A speech which aroused special comment was one he made at Birmingham on 16th December, 1898. The great Liberal Unionist journal of the city, the *Birmingham Daily Post*, had exhorted him on the morning of the day of the speech to repudiate the policy of Home Rule and give a straight lead to the distracted Liberal party. His reply was clear and decisive. "So far as I am concerned," he said, "there are no principles which I have ever professed on this subject which I am in the least degree prepared to recant or disavow." At the same time, he emphatically asserted the entire independence of the Liberal party, in the same way as the Irish party had asserted theirs. He also frankly recognised, as all sane men must recognise, that a new factor of great importance had been introduced into the situation by the grant to Ireland of local self-government; and he declared his

opinion that that policy should be given a full and fair trial before great constitutional changes were again put forward.

He also sympathised with Lord Rosebery's exhortation and warning concerning the conversion of England and Scotland, "the predominant partners," to the support of Home Rule before it could have any prospect of becoming law. Speaking at Darwin, on 28th January, 1899, he said: "What has been, and what is at this moment the real obstacle to the attainment of Irish self-government? It appears to me, to use Lord Rosebery's phrase, to be the fact that the 'predominant partner' has not been convinced of its necessity. Then I ask you," he continued, "is it treason to the Irish cause to say that the next step in its development, in order to produce that conviction which every practical politician must agree is the essential condition of the ultimate attainment of Home Rule—the next step must be the experience gained and the object lessons taught by an Ireland possessing self-government on the more limited scale of local institutions?"

Mr. Asquith in the same speech also pointed to the fact that there were important public questions, notably the education question, on which the Irish and Liberal parties were at variance and their policies sharply antagonistic; and he refused to allow the Liberal party to commit itself in any way to any pledge as to measures to which it would give priority if returned to power.

On 29th September, 1901, Mr. Asquith gave a straight lead to his party on the question of Home Rule, and in clear and unmistakable language defined his views. The Irish party had, he said, resumed its freedom, and during the last few days had made a gift of an undoubted Liberal seat to the Tory candidate. "If the Irish party is free and independent," he continued, "so also I venture to claim is the Liberal party. I have for some time held the opinion, which I have expressed to you, my constituents, before now, that the Liberal party ought not to assume the duties and the responsibilities of government unless it

can rely on an independent Liberal majority in the House of Commons. Such a majority may take a long time to secure, though in my judgment it is far more likely to come upon that footing than upon any other, but be the time long or short it will, I am satisfied, be found in the long run that it is the only practical alternative to a Tory Government. I am painfully aware that the language I am using, plain though it is, will, if I leave the matter there, be misunderstood in some quarters and be misrepresented in others. Let me add, therefore, that the problem of Irish government is as serious and as intractable as it ever was. You cannot kill it by kindness. You cannot extinguish it by land purchase. You may shut your eyes to it, but it will continue to stare you in the face. Indeed, in some ways, the problem grows more complicated and more perplexing, as it is more clearly seen to be closely bound up with two other problems of statesmanship the future has to solve—the efficiency of our parliamentary machinery and the relation of the different parts of the Empire to the centre and to one another. For my own part I believe as strongly as ever I did in the two governing principles which I have preached among you ever since I have had the honour to be your representative, namely, first, the necessity of maintaining the universal, absolute and unimpaired supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, and subject to that condition the policy of giving as large and as liberal a devolution of local powers and local responsibilities as statesmanship can from time to time devise."

Mr. Asquith further amplified and emphasised his position in the course of a letter which he wrote to his constituents on the occasion of his joining the Liberal League for the purpose of laying before them an explicit exposition of his political opinions.

After referring to other subjects, the report of which is included in the chapter headed "Liberal Imperialist," he continued: "What, then, is to be the attitude of the party to Home Rule? I was first returned as your representative in 1886, when Home Rule was the dividing line between

parties and the great issue of the election. Looking back to the years which followed, I may fairly claim to have done what in me lay, both in Parliament and outside, for the promotion of that cause, and it will always be to me a cherished memory that I had the honour of being associated with Mr. Gladstone, the most illustrious Liberal of the nineteenth century, in his last attempt to bring loyalty and contentment to Ireland. Why did that attempt fail? It failed because of the rooted repugnance of a large majority of the electorate of Great Britain to the creation of a legislative body in Dublin—a repugnance which not even Mr. Gladstone's magnificent courage, unrivalled authority and unquenchable enthusiasm were able to overcome. The eight years which have since elapsed have done nothing to conciliate and not a little to harden and stiffen the adverse judgment of the British electorate. A great deal of loose rhetoric is current on the subject; but if we are honest we must ask ourselves this practical question—Is it to be part of the policy, the programme, of our party that if returned to power it will introduce into the House of Commons a bill for Irish Home Rule? The answer, in my judgment, is 'No'. And why? Not because we are satisfied—who is?—with the results of six years of Unionist administration; not because we think that the Irish problem has been either settled or shelved; but because the history of these years, and not least that part of it which is most recent, has made it plain that the ends which we have always had and still have in view—the reconciliation of Ireland to the Empire, and the relief of the Imperial Parliament (not as regards Ireland alone) from a load of unnecessary burdens—can only be attained by methods which will carry with them step by step the sanction and sympathy of British opinion. To recognise facts like these and to act accordingly is not apostasy; it is common sense."

It can probably be safely assumed that this declaration represents Mr. Asquith's attitude on this question at the present time. A close study of his career convinces us that when the time arrives his clear-sighted, business-like

intelligence will take a very practical view of the subject. Such a view seems to us to be as follows: The Irish question has had expended upon it, without stint, the full genius and energy of the Liberal party for a great number of years; but the majority of the electorate remains unconvinced, shows no sign of becoming convinced, and is perhaps more unconvinced to-day than it has ever been of the necessity of Home Rule. It is certain that where Mr. Gladstone failed, backed up by the fresh vigour and enthusiasm which a party under such a leader puts into a new cause, no Liberal leader at the present time, and in all human probability for a considerable time to come, can take up the question, on which the great majority of the electorate have now closed and prejudiced minds, with even the remotest prospect of success.

With these hard facts before them, we put it to all right-thinking people, would it be just, would it be honest and straightforward dealing with their supporters, for the Liberal leaders to condemn to another long period of impotency the forces of Liberalism, which we Liberals earnestly believe form the greatest of all human instruments making for the progress and happiness of our country?

And there is this further consideration of the utmost importance. Assuming that a Liberal Government is returned to power, the first subject to which it is pledged to give attention is the drastic amendment of the Education Act. To this the Irish party would undoubtedly offer determined opposition. Nor have Liberals the slightest reason for believing that in their resistance to Mr. Chamberlain's pernicious tariff proposals they will receive any substantial support from the Irish members. The position then is this: that on the two cardinal items of its programme the Liberal party will meet with determined opposition to the one, and at the best divided and lukewarm support for the other, from the Irish Nationalist members. Thus, looking at the matter in the light of hard facts, any renewal of the old conditions of alliance between a Liberal Government and the Irish party is

utterly impracticable. And to be plain, the sooner a definite announcement to this effect is made by the Liberal leaders, the better it will be for all concerned. This does not entail any abandonment of the Irish cause nor any betrayal of Liberal convictions on the justice and necessity of a measure of Home Rule. But it does entail, and we think such a course is justifiable on the highest grounds, the postponement of the question until it is more ripe for treatment, and its elimination as an issue between the Liberal and Unionist parties at the next general election. That is the only honest policy open to the Liberal leaders. Let them adopt it boldly and courageously as Mr. Asquith has done, without hesitation and without equivocation. It is the only way to gain real power. None other is worth having. Both the party and the country have had enough in the past of government on Irish sufferance. The interests of one part of the United Kingdom must be subsidiary to the interests of the whole.

We desire to refer here to Mr. Asquith's relations with the great political chief whom he served so faithfully and well. To Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Asquith owes to some extent the remarkable rapidity of his advance to the front rank of modern statesmen. No doubt, sooner or later, his exceptional gifts would have compelled their own reward; but he is indebted to Mr. Gladstone's intuitive genius for discovering, and his kindness in encouraging, talents and powers of uncommon quality, and for the advantage which he enjoyed of having placed within his reach those opportunities of distinguishing himself which are invaluable to the ambitious politician.

The great esteem in which Mr. Gladstone held Mr. Asquith's abilities was demonstrated, as we have already recorded, in a remarkable manner by his appointment to the Home Secretaryship in the 1892 administration. All through Mr. Gladstone's term of office as Premier in that Ministry, Mr. Asquith was regarded as one who enjoyed in a special degree the confidence of the venerable statesman, and the *Spectator* and other great journals paid

particular attention to his speeches as likely to reflect something of the mind of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Asquith's ardent admiration for Mr. Gladstone has been coextensive with his interest in political affairs. No other statesman, apart from Mr. Morley, has given Mr. Gladstone a more concentrated and undivided personal and political support. It was by his fine eulogium of Mr. Gladstone, and his bold and unqualified support of his leader's policy, at the Liberal Federation meeting at Nottingham in October, 1887, that Mr. Asquith first attracted the notice of the great body of the Liberal party. His speeches contain some of the finest tributes to Mr. Gladstone that have ever been rendered to the greatest of Liberal statesmen. In the course of a speech at Northampton, on 31st August, 1893, in which he reviewed the fight in Parliament for Home Rule, he said: "It must be admitted as we look back upon the struggle that we have enjoyed very great advantages. First and foremost we have had at our head the greatest of political captains, the survivor of the heroic age of British politics, who has brought to this task not only the resources of an unexampled experience, but the undimmed enthusiasm of perpetual youth."

In March, 1894, Mr. Asquith referred in the following eloquent terms to Mr. Gladstone's resignation: "We have sustained during the last few weeks the severest blow which any merely personal change could inflict upon us. We have been deprived of the leadership of that great captain whose name has been for us, for more than a generation past, in every alternation of victory and defeat, a watchword and a rallying-cry." And later on in the same speech he said: "Scotland in days gone by has given to Liberalism some of its most illustrious pioneers and martyrs. Even at this moment one of the greatest of her sons, under the glorious weight of years spent in the service of great causes and high ideals, has reluctantly laid down the bow which none but himself could bend. Let us, lesser men of a later time, take up the work which he has left us, resolved that,

so far as our powers and our possibilities allow, it shall not suffer in our hands."

He paid another notable tribute at the banquet of the Association of Municipal Corporations held in March, 1894. After referring to the generous unanimity of appreciation by all parties, which Mr. Gladstone's resignation had called forth, he said: "I cannot trust myself to say on this subject more than one further word. What Mr. Gladstone has been to England, to the House of Commons, to our corporate political life, the world knows and history will tell; but no one who has not had the privilege—as I am glad and proud that I have had—of sharing his counsels and standing by his side can possibly know in full measure his transcendent gifts of intellect and of character, and the unsparing and unstinted profuseness with which he has always been ready to place them at the disposal of the humblest of his colleagues and friends."

One further quotation. At Launceston, on 24th June, 1898, a month after Mr. Gladstone's death, Mr. Asquith delivered with great feeling a noble eulogy to his memory: "This great meeting," he said, "was to have been held three weeks ago, but was postponed until to-day in order that the Liberals of Cornwall might associate themselves in that unprecedented manifestation of national mourning in which men of every rank and every party joined at the grave of the greatest Englishman of the century. Mr. Gladstone's name and fame were not the property of any one party in the State, they had passed into and become part of their common national inheritance. But nevertheless, it was becoming and right that they whom he had led through all the vicissitudes of good and evil fortune should be glad to remember that they followed him with unwavering allegiance to the end." After referring to the "surpassing eloquence and beauty" of Mr. Morley's fine tribute at Leeds, Mr. Asquith continued: "Courage, tenacity and faith, those saving virtues of public life were Mr. Gladstone's, and never in their history had they been more splendidly displayed, or in

more varied and testing emergencies; and those who were privileged, some of them to share his counsel, all of them to fight under his banner, might treasure the memory of his example as the most precious legacy which the Liberalism of the nineteenth century could bequeath to its posterity."

## CHAPTER XI

### DISESTABLISHMENT

IT is probable that Mr. Asquith's interest in the question of disestablishment has been coextensive with his serious attention to political affairs. As already recorded in the chapter on his university career, in 1871 he moved a motion in the "Union" at Oxford—"That in the opinion of this House it is desirable that the existing connection between Church and State in this country should cease," and in his first election address he stated that he was opposed on principle to Church establishments, while as early as 1888 we find him taking a prominent public part in this controversy.

In that year, at the annual meeting of "The Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control," held in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he seconded a resolution in favour of disestablishment. "The question of disestablishment was," he said, "essentially a modern and practical problem. At the moment that dissent was admitted as a civil right, the position of the Established Church became practically untenable. The Church was no longer coextensive with the nation, and was, therefore, not a national institution." It is interesting to notice that the question which he described in 1888 as "essentially a modern and practical problem" was destined to become at no great space of time the subject of his most ambitious effort at legislation.

Although it was not till 1895 that a really great and workmanlike effort was made to legislate for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, this question had long

held a foremost place in the projected programme of the Liberal party, and to a great majority formed an essential article of its faith. The agitation of the Liberation Society, conducted with great ability, in season and out of season, amid much discouragement but not without, also, substantial progress, had received the cordial approval of many of the first statesmen in the Liberal party, and the enthusiastic support of the great majority of Liberal members of Parliament and representatives of Liberal associations in the constituencies.

The progress of the movement had been so rapid, it had gathered such force in the country and was represented with such strength and ability in Parliament, that it had become impossible, at the time when Mr. Asquith assumed the Home Secretaryship, to any longer deny it a first place in the official programme of the Liberal party. Mr. Asquith gladly welcomed this condition of affairs, and he never ceased to impress upon the country the urgency and importance of this great reform.

When he became Home Secretary, therefore, the appeals that were addressed to him in favour of legislation were almost superfluous. During the early part of the Home Rule Ministry, however, it was not found possible, or considered advisable, to deal with the question. But at length, the rank and file of the party, and especially the Welsh members, became impatient of further delay. Everywhere at Liberal meetings in the country references to the question as one demanding instant attention evoked demonstrations of great enthusiasm. Mr. Asquith himself always gave it an important place in his speeches, and he repeatedly pledged the Ministry to give it legislative treatment at the first opportunity.

An earnest of the Government's sincerity was given on 23rd February, 1893, when Mr. Asquith introduced what he termed a "Suspensory Bill," with the avowed object of "preventing for a limited time the creation of new interests in Church of England bishoprics, dignities and benefices, in Wales and Monmouthshire".

He opened a vigorous and uncompromising speech by

stating frankly that he was undoubtedly asking the House to take the first step towards the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England in Wales, a declaration received with a hurricane of cheering from the Liberal benches, again and again renewed as he announced that the Liberal party were irrevocably pledged to the policy of Welsh disestablishment, a policy which he said they had brought prominently before the country at the general election. He then proceeded to explain the objects of the bill, and also stated very briefly the case for disestablishment. A warning of what was to be expected when the real battle came to be fought was given by the fierce opposition with which the Conservative leaders immediately met Mr. Asquith's proposals.

In the following year, on 18th April, the Home Secretary announced that, with the aid of his colleagues, he had for months past been "endeavouring to formulate a scheme which would effect the objects the Liberal party had in view regarding disestablishment, while doing ample justice and rendering indulgent treatment to every interest involved," and he promised that the proposals decided upon should be introduced to Parliament within a few days.

True to his promise, on 26th April, 1894, Mr. Asquith rose to introduce a bill "to terminate the establishment of the Church of England in Wales and Monmouthshire, and to make provision in respect to the temporalities thereof". The Church of England in Wales, he said, was the Church of a comparatively small minority of the population, and to the bulk of the Welsh people it was a symbol not of national unity but of national discord. Referring to the area covered by the bill, he explained why Monmouthshire was brought within its scope, and said that with regard to certain parishes belonging to English dioceses, though included geographically in Wales, and *vice versa*, the geographical and not the diocesan boundary would be followed. The proposed date of disestablishment was 1st January, 1896, and following the Irish precedent of 1869, it was proposed that during the transitional interval in the

case of vacant sees, bishops would be appointed by the Crown on the recommendation of the Archbishop of Canterbury or of three Welsh bishops, but the prelate so appointed would not be entitled to sit in the House of Lords. Vacant benefices would be filled up as at present, though the new incumbents would not be held to have vested interests in their livings. Discussing next the nature and effect of disestablishment, he remarked that the Church of England, as far as it was established in Wales and Monmouthshire, would cease to be so established, all rights of patronage would be extinguished, all ecclesiastical corporations, sole or aggregate, would be extinguished, and no Welsh bishops would be summoned to sit in the House of Lords, though the existing bishops would retain their titles and their precedence. With reference to the status of the Church, he explained that the ecclesiastical courts in Wales would cease to have any coercive jurisdiction, and that the Welsh clergy would no longer be represented in Convocation. The doctrines and discipline of the Church would continue, not with the force of law, but as binding upon members of the Church by the effect of mutual agreement; and the bishops, clergy and laity were to have power to hold synods and to frame constitutions for the government of the Church either as a whole or according to diocese. Moreover they were empowered to appoint a "Representative Body," which might be incorporated by the Sovereign.

Passing to the complicated and difficult question of disendowment, he calculated that the total gross ecclesiastical income derived from Wales and Monmouthshire was £279,000 a year. The affairs of the Established Church of Ireland were wound up by the machinery of liquidation, but the history of that transaction was by no means encouraging, as it placed at the disposal of Parliament a huge capital sum, which offered an almost irresistible temptation in emergencies, and which had in fact been drawn upon from time to time until scarcely any of it was left. Consequently that precedent would not be followed, and the bill would preserve and safeguard for national and public

purposes the *corpus* of the property which would pass from the Church to the nation, while as far as that property at present attached to localities, it would in future be applied and enjoyed locally and parochially. A Commission was to be appointed, consisting of three Commissioners, two of whom would be paid £1,500, and £1,000 a year respectively out of Church funds, and the third would be unpaid. These Commissioners would have the necessary borrowing powers to carry out their operations, and their accounts would be laid before Parliament. The property of the Church, as ascertained by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, would be vested immediately in the Welsh Commissioners, subject to all encumbrances upon it, and also to the existing interests of incumbents and holders of ecclesiastical offices. The churches would, on the representations of the Representative Body, be vested in that body, but the cathedrals would be treated as national monuments, and would be retained by the Welsh Commissioners, who would be under an obligation to maintain them and keep them in repair. Besides, at the request of the Church Body, it would be the duty of the Commissioners to permit the cathedrals to be used for Divine service. As to the parsonage houses, the Government thought it would, on the whole, be right to hand them over to the Representative Body. Episcopal and capitular residences were to be retained by the Commissioners, who would permit them to be used as ecclesiastical residences, subject to the obligation of the Representative Body to keep them in repair. All private benefactions given since 1703 might, in the opinion of the Government, properly go to the Representative Body. With regard to the burial-grounds and the glebes, they would be vested in the Parish, Borough, or District Councils, and the tithe rent charge, the most valuable asset of the Church in Wales, would be vested in the council of the county within which the land chargeable with it was situated. Neither the Commissioners nor any local authority would be permitted to sell, alienate or exchange property without the consent of the Local Government Board. Dealing next with the manner in

which existing interests were to be treated, Mr. Asquith stated that the bill would give every incumbent a full life-interest in his office, and the possession of the parsonage and the glebe. As regards the tithe rent charge, an incumbent would no longer collect it, but he would receive the net proceeds thereof from the Welsh Commissioners. He admitted that under this scheme the ultimate enjoyment by the Welsh people of this property of the Church would be postponed for an indefinite period, but he contended that the proposal of the Government was preferable to the Irish plan of commutation. They felt, however, that an absolutely stereotyped system of treating existing interests might bear hardly upon the Church and the Welsh people. Therefore they proposed an alternative method under which an incumbent might exchange his existing interest or life annuity for a compensation annuity on a lower scale, he being discharged from the obligation of continuing to perform the duties of his cure. The details of this scale of compensation were set forth in the schedule of the bill. In the event of an incumbent choosing to adopt this alternative, the consent of the Representative Body would be necessary. As to curates, they would receive no compensation, and in this respect the Government departed from the Irish precedent. In regard to lay patrons, the precedent was followed of the Act of 1874, relating to private patronage in the Scotch Church, and compensation, if claimed, might be granted, though it must not exceed one year's emoluments of the benefice. The lay officers of the Church, who were very few in number, would receive reasonable compensation. Lastly, he adverted to the ultimate application of the funds which would be placed at the disposal of the Welsh people. They consisted first of parochial property and central property, the proceeds of which were now paid to episcopal and capitular bodies, and were at present vested in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Among the purposes to which the property might be applied were the support of college and other hospitals, dispensaries or convalescent homes, the provision of trained nurses for the sick poor, the foundation and maintenance of public

technical and higher education, including the establishment of national libraries and museums and an academy of art, and the promotion of any public purpose of local or general utility for which provision was not made by statute out of the public rates. The central fund would only be applied to purposes in which Wales, as a whole, was interested.

In concluding, Mr. Asquith, in his peroration, said: "We believe that in submitting this bill to Parliament we are taking the best step that statesmanship can devise to put an end to a state of things which, so long as it exists, will be a constant source of embitterment and animosity among the various sections of the community which constitute the Principality, and which as a source of embitterment and animosity must largely hamper the efforts which they were all making to improve the religious and spiritual condition of the people. We rest our position on the broad principles of justice. We cannot believe it to be to the interests of a Church—we know it is not to the interests of the State—to maintain in the country in a position of privilege and ascendency a Church which represents the religious opinions of a small minority, and which enjoys exclusively property which, in our view, is national property to be appropriated to national purposes, by no other title than a historical title, the origin of which will not bear careful consideration, and which has certainly not been strengthened in its hold upon the convictions and confidence of the Welsh people by the events which have since occurred. We think that in this bill we do no injustice to the Church. We preserve jealously and generously every interest which is entitled to recognition and consideration at the hands of Parliament. Subject to that we set free for purposes of great and lasting public benefit a property to which the Welsh people, and the Welsh people alone, have, in our opinion, a legitimate title."

The speech occupied an hour and three-quarters, and was praised on all sides as an intellectual treat of the highest order. It was one of those masterpieces of comprehensive lucidity in the composition of which Mr.

Asquith has no superior, and it enormously strengthened his already high position as a great parliamentary debater, and as a politician of the first rank with exceptional capacities for constructive statesmanship.

Although meeting his proposals with the promise of an implacable opposition, the leaders of the Opposition were generous in their praise of the marked ability of his speech. Mr. Balfour referred to it as "an exposition of masterly lucidity," and *The Times*, in its leading article, spoke of it as "lucid and comprehensive". Mr. Lloyd-George, as a typical representative of Welsh opinion, declared it to be a "measure accepted generally as a highly statesmanlike measure," but he did not approve the clauses giving compensation to the clergy, his reason being that the Church had always been the enemy of the Welsh people, and was not entitled to the consideration extended to it in the bill.

As was to be expected, the bill and Mr. Asquith's exposition of it were received with the greatest satisfaction and enthusiasm by all sections of the Liberal party, both in Parliament, in the press and in the country. The writer of the "Political Notes" in *The Times* remarked that the bill was regarded with satisfaction by the Liberal members, and was held to be a fair and equitable settlement of a question hedged round with difficulties. It did not wholly satisfy some of the more ardent spirits of the Welsh party, but there was not much complaint.

Another comment, typical of the opposition criticism of Mr. Asquith's proposals, was that made by the parliamentary correspondent of the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*: "Mr. Secretary Asquith has deserved well of his party. This is the universal verdict on his bill and the manner of his introduction thereof. The bill is everywhere pronounced to be a capital bill of its sort, and the speech in which it was introduced is praised for its painstaking lucidity. Politically, Mr. Asquith never stood higher than he did this night. I have heard members of his party who used to sneer at his superior person airs admit that he is far and away the ablest man in the Cabinet, and

that none of his colleagues could have made the speech he has made to-night. To say this is to give him his due, for, bad as the object of the bill is, one may recognise the cleverness in the execution of the fell intention."

The bill immediately became the centre of fierce political controversy, conducted with the greatest energy and determination on both sides. No possible source of assistance was left untapped by either party, and every conceivable argument was used for all it was worth. On 17th May, 1894, the archbishops and bishops of the Church of England—with the notable exception of the able Bishop of Worcester, Dr. Perowne—issued a manifesto in which they characterised the bill as a proposal to dismember the Church, and to deal with the position of it in a way detrimental alike to the spiritual, moral and temporal well-being of many of its parishes. The manifesto concluded with an urgent, almost hysterical, appeal for support in destroying the measure.

The bill did not make any further progress in Parliament during 1894, and Mr. Asquith had to reintroduce it to the House on 25th February in the following year. He made a business-like unsentimental speech, in which he very briefly recapitulated the chief features of his proposals. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, who was recognised as the leader of the specially organised opposition to the bill, frankly announced a policy of sheer obstruction, and avowed the determination of the Opposition to examine the proposals in the minutest detail, intimating also that they would do so in no friendly spirit.

Mr. Asquith, in a crowded House, rose on 21st March, 1895, to move the second reading. He opened with a statement, made in admirable taste and showing great generosity of feeling, of the character of the controversy aroused by his proposals. After saying that the time had now arrived when the great issues of principle raised in the bill could be appropriately discussed, and the grounds of policy that had led to its introduction stated, he said: "The questions involved in a proposal of this kind must under all circumstances be questions of the

utmost delicacy and gravity. But in the present case the difficulty of dealing with them is greatly enhanced by the extreme and at the same time perfectly intelligible sensitiveness of feeling which this controversy with respect to the Welsh Church has aroused both on the one side and on the other. On the one hand, we have the overwhelming majority of the representatives of the people of Wales, who see in this measure the means—long delayed, ardently and I think I may say passionately desired by the vast bulk of the people—for the removal of what they conceive to be a grievous and glaring injustice. On the other hand, we are confronted by those who look upon this bill as nothing better than a veiled attack upon the Church of England, promoted, as they tell us, upon false pretences and for sordid reasons, and fraught, if it should ever succeed in passing into law, with injurious and even disastrous consequences as well to the spiritual as to the temporal interests of the Church. No wonder that in an atmosphere charged with these currents of feeling the right hon. baronet, the member for Bristol (Sir M. Hicks-Beach) the other day, lamenting, as he said, that we seemed to be divided from one another by a distance as great as that which separates the poles, should almost have despaired of a common meeting-ground between us for argument. For my part I desire, and I am certain all who are responsible for this bill desire, to avoid as far as we can the importation into the discussion of unnecessary heat. I shall endeavour to the best of my ability to do so, and I trust I may appeal to hon. gentlemen opposite, who feel so strongly and so sincerely upon the subject, at any rate to give me a forbearing and an indulgent hearing, while I on my part will ask from them in advance forgiveness if unwittingly by any phrase or argument of mine I give offence to a sentiment which, whether I share it or not, I at any rate understand and respect."

Mr. Asquith then proceeded to vindicate his proposals. The central and essential object of the bill, to which everything else was subsidiary, was, he said, to terminate the

legal establishment of the Church in Wales and Monmouthshire. From the earliest times the State had claimed and exercised the controlling voice with regard to the establishment and endowments of the National Church, and it was a historical fallacy to represent the Church of England as ever having been a mere offshoot and dependency of the Church of Rome. In this country the State had always insisted that the position of the Church, its privileges and its endowments should be kept under the supreme control of the Crown and Parliament. The existence of the Irish Church Act was the most complete assertion which any legislature had ever made of the right to do what it pleased with the *status* of an Established Church and to divert its endowments to purely secular purposes. Morality did not change its colour when it passed St. George's Channel, and the Irish statute might be taken as a sufficient justification and precedent when the Government were assailed with charges of sacrilege. This bill raised no new question either of constitutional practice or of the limits of the moral competence and authority of Parliament.

Mr. Asquith utterly denied that the establishment in Wales was a National Church at the present day. No doubt it was national in its inception, but by its subsequent incorporation with, and subordination to, the Anglican Church, it became denationalised. He then traced the growth of Welsh dissent in the eighteenth century, and pointed out that at the beginning of the nineteenth century there were nearly one thousand Nonconformist congregations in the Principality, and that the number had now increased to four thousand. This was due to the fact that the Welsh Church, which in its origin was of native and spontaneous growth, had for centuries been used by the State and the English Church as a dependency of their own, in defiance of the sentiments of the great body of the Welsh people. At the same time, he did not deny that since 1831 there had been an extensive and beneficial change in the spirit and temper of the Anglican Church in Wales, which, however, was still the Church of the minority. At all events, thirty-one out of the thirty-four

parliamentary representatives of Wales and Monmouthshire were pledged to disestablishment. And there were other tests equally convincing. Putting aside the test of a religious census, there existed means of ascertaining the comparative strength of the real, living, active membership of the different religious communities in the Principality. The published statistics regarding the number of communicants disclosed the fact that, taking the four leading Nonconformist bodies, the number was 381,000 against 118,000 in the Church. The Calvinistic Methodists and Congregationalists alone had each a larger number of communicants than the Church of England in Wales. Exactly the same lesson was taught by the attendance at the Sunday schools. The total attendance at Church Sunday schools was 145,000, while in the Sunday schools of the Nonconformist bodies the attendance was 515,000. The results of both these tests showed that the proportion of Nonconformists to Churchmen in Wales was something between three and four to one.

Referring to the statement by the Bishop of St. Asaph that in many parishes there was no resident Nonconformist minister, Mr. Asquith explained that one minister often served for two parishes, and he said that of the 4,000 Nonconformist chapels in Wales, there was not one destitute of a Sunday service, sometimes conducted by the minister residing in the parish or in charge of adjoining parishes, sometimes by laymen qualified for the duty. In the large majority there were two preaching services and a Sunday school, and there was not one chapel where the Sacrament was not administered once a month. Retorting on the Bishop, he asked how the Church stood in this respect. Was it very important, he pertinently inquired, to have a resident minister in a parish when he has no congregation? He instanced the case of the county of Anglesey, where there were seventy-six parishes, out of which twenty-seven or more than a third were without rector, vicar or curate resident in them. In three of those parishes there were no buildings of any kind where the services of the Church of England could be held, the churches having been de-

molished. In several of the parishes service was held only once a month. In one case the service was attended by eleven persons, including the minister, the sexton, the gamekeeper and the servants of the squire. The tithes of the parishes referred to amounted to more than £7,000 a year. This state of things was not due to the religious apathy of the people. The Nonconformist bodies were strong and flourishing in these very parishes, the Calvinistic Methodists alone having eighty-four chapels, thirty-four schoolrooms and 11,000 communicants.

In conclusion, Mr. Asquith said he agreed with those who said that, for the welfare of the community, the presence of a standing witness of the great spiritual forces in every parish of the land was a vital necessity. "But is it necessary," he asked, "that this standing witness should be an officer of the State as well as a minister of the Church? What, as is too often the case in Wales—what if his message is unheeded, if his church is empty, if his mission is futile? Not, be it observed, because of apathy and indifference, not because the parishioners are torpid or perverse, but because they find satisfaction and stimulus for their religious wants in unconsecrated buildings and in the services of an unauthorised ministry. The people of Wales have shown in days gone by that they can and will provide for their own spiritual needs; and it is in the sincere belief that this bill will minister as well to the religious as to the social welfare of the Principality that I ask this House to affirm it as a measure both politic and just."

The speech was a great one in every respect, eloquent in delivery and perfectly lucid in composition, persuasive and unprovocative, admirable alike in temper and method. "An intellectual treat of no mean order," was Sir Michael Hicks-Beach's comment upon it, and *The Times* in criticising it remarked that "the speech in which Mr. Asquith yesterday moved the Second Reading of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill was unexceptionable in form and language".

Mr. Chamberlain, in order to show his approval of the principle of the bill, voted for the second reading, which

was carried by a majority of forty-four. This action of the member for West Birmingham and his generally friendly attitude toward the policy of disestablishment excited great resentment in the Conservative party, but he faced it with characteristic courage. Mr. Chamberlain put his view of the position as follows :—

"Disestablishment in Wales must come ; and the only question is whether it shall be accompanied with a just treatment of the Church with regard to its funds. This can be secured now. If Churchmen would be wise, they would urge their leaders to devote themselves to this part of the subject."

Mr. Asquith's policy received widespread and enthusiastic support in the country, which was greatly stimulated by a series of speeches which he delivered. At Nottingham, on 3rd April, 1895, he made a spirited reply to the charge that the bill, if passed into law, would commit an act of sacrilege. "I agree," he said, "that this is a matter on which there may be an honest difference of opinion, but I deny, with all the strength and sincerity of which I am capable, that it follows that because a man thinks that it might be to the advantage of the spiritual activity and of the beneficent influence of the Church in a community, where at present it represents and includes but a small minority of the people, to strip itself of these invidious and extraneous privileges, that that man is to be put down as an enemy either to the doctrines which the Church teaches or of the spiritual organisation in which the Church is embodied." Far from desiring to commit any act of sacrilege, Mr. Asquith's great object was to relieve the Church of her special State favours and the material obligations accompanying them which so greatly cripple her work, and, by dividing her from all other religious bodies, render impossible that complete union and co-operation of the Christian Churches, or at least of the Protestant Churches, which all right-thinking religious people earnestly desire.

The bill entered on the Committee stage on 6th May, 1895, and it had a very troubled passage. With a majority

varying from seventeen to thirty, but usually in the teens, and with an implacable opposition conducted with great energy and ability, it was trying and difficult work to make progress. And what made matters worse was that the Government were worried by discontent among their own supporters. Some parts of the bill were not drastic enough for the more advanced Welsh members, and on more than one occasion the measure was put in peril by the opposition, sometimes threatened and sometimes actual, of the extreme section of the Welsh party. The lowest majority in favour of the bill was seven, and this was recorded against an amendment moved by Mr. D. A. Thomas, the leader of the Welsh Liberals, who moved on 20th June, 1895, to omit the section which provided that the Welsh Commissioners should vest the tithe rent charge in the county council of the county in which the land out of which the tithe rent charge issued was situated.

Again and again Mr. Asquith was hard pressed, but he refused to be intimidated by either party into taking any course which he considered unfair, and he courageously kept on his way, replying with great skill and spirit to the incessant attacks upon him. Sir Richard Temple, referring to the bill in his memoirs, remarks that "Mr. Asquith showed exceeding ability and debating power, together with patience, forbearance and self-command, amidst the storm by which he was encompassed, and the logical missiles with which he was pelted".

The bill was still in Committee when Parliament was dissolved on the defeat of the Liberal Government.

It is impossible to study Mr. Asquith's speeches on the question of disestablishment without being deeply impressed by the broad, statesmanlike tolerance of his mind, and the spacious comprehensive character of his views. He treated a subject of the greatest delicacy and difficulty with a dignity and tact, and at the same time with an ability and determination, that won from friends and foes alike tributes of genuine respect and admiration.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE HOUSE OF LORDS

MR. ASQUITH has always been in favour of a very thorough solution of the problem presented by the House of Lords. Speaking upon the question, which was then a burning one, on 9th June, 1899, at a Palmerston Club dinner at Oxford, he said that before the Liberal party committed itself to any scheme for the reconstruction of the House of Lords, it had to be decided whether, in a country which had achieved a Democratic constitution, and which was circumstanced like our own, there was any room and any function for a Second Chamber. If a Second Chamber was needed at all, he continued, it must be either a co-ordinate authority with, or a check upon, the first. A co-ordinate Second Chamber must be based upon the representative principle, and he greatly doubted whether the existence side by side of two representative bodies would increase either the usefulness or efficiency of popular government. If, on the other hand, all that was needed was a drag upon the coach, the present House of Lords served the purpose. His own view was that we were better off without any Second Chamber, but he recognised that the subject was one requiring the fullest consideration. In his election address of 1892 he stated that he was in favour of putting an end to an Hereditary Chamber, but he did not indicate whether he considered it necessary to replace it with a representative body.

On 5th April, 1894, however, he made a speech in

which he showed that he recognised that a Second Chamber of some kind was probably inevitable, as being the only remedy that would be acceptable to the country. "The question of reforming or of doing something with the House of Lords," he said, "is now quite within the range of practical politics, and I trust that the Liberal party will devote itself assiduously to the duty of devising the best scheme which experience, knowledge and foresight can suggest for removing this intolerable obstacle to the progress of popular legislation, and for securing that the expressed and deliberate wish of the people should be able to give itself prompt and effective embodiment in the Statute Book as well as in the administration of the realm."

Again, on 22nd October, 1894, he admitted that it might be prudent and necessary to take security against the possible danger of the House of Commons misinterpreting or outliving its mandate; but surely, he said, the resources of statesmanship should be equal to devising some better remedy against that danger than the subordination of the representatives of the House of Commons to the capricious and one-sided jurisdiction of what was a privileged party committee. He ageeed that in a matter of such gravity and difficulty prudence and care ought to be shown in the proposals that were made. He contended that the step they advocated was no revolutionary one, but merely the practical recognition of the logical consequences of those measures of popular enfranchisement which both parties in the State, during the last thirty years, had passed.

The question of the House of Lords continued to be a favourite topic of controversy, and Mr. Asquith devoted a great deal of time to devising an acceptable alternative authority. What are probably his present views were embodied in a speech at the Eighty Club on 16th February, 1898. He discussed the proposal that had been put forward that the veto of the House of Lords should be transferred from an absolute into a limited veto, in other words, that it should only be operative either for a specified period of time, or as against a specified number of declarations of opinion on the part of the Representative Chamber.

He pointed out that this was open to the obvious objection that in the case where there was a small majority in the House of Commons, elected upon numerous issues and in a transient state of popular feeling, the reiterated vote of the House of Commons might be regarded as not representing the settled and permanent judgment of the nation. As an alternative, he said that it had long seemed to him as at least worthy of consideration, whether a solution might not be found in some modified application of the principle of the referendum. This would ensure, he argued, the judgment of the nation being taken on the single question at issue, and would prevent it being confused by the introduction of other considerations. It may be noted that on this question of the utility of the referendum, Mr. Chamberlain is in substantial agreement with Mr. Asquith.

Considerable space has been devoted to Mr. Asquith's views on the best method of dealing with the House of Lords, because that is essentially the important point. All reasonable men are agreed that no sound logical defence can be made of its present constitution ; the difficulty lies in the wide divergence of opinion that exists as to the wisest practicable alternative. A brief resumé, however, of Mr. Asquith's indictment of the House of Lords will not be out of place, because he has been generally recognised as a prominent leader in the matter, and no one, not even Mr. Chamberlain, has put the case against the present system with greater cogency and force.

He dealt comprehensively with the subject in a speech to his constituents on 22nd October, 1894. He said that he started from the proposition that it is the object of representative government to secure an authentic interpretation and a prompt and effectual execution of the national will. It was not necessary to believe that the people were always wise, but the great advantage of the House of Commons was that it secured in the long run the preponderance of general as distinguished from sectional and class interests, and it brought about the widest diffusion of sensible responsibility. The House of Lords could not,

he insisted, permanently set itself up against the popular judgment, and it was a clumsy instrument, because it could only work by delaying legislation on which the other House was resolved, and by compelling a dissolution, which did not enable the judgment of the country to be taken on a specific issue, but threw all the political issues current into a common melting-pot, with a result that was often chaotic and confusing. He then turned to the question of how the House of Lords performed its present duties. The House of Lords, he said, should be prepared in the proper performance of its functions as an impartial revising authority, to correct slovenly and precipitate legislation; but it must also be keen to distinguish between the set and the transient drift of national sentiment, and it must always be ready to defer to the clear manifestation of the popular will. That was the ideal House of Lords, a very different body, he remarked, to the actual one. The composition of the latter, to begin with, was not of the kind to be expected in a body entrusted with the difficult and delicate duties mentioned. Mostly all its members were chosen from a single class and without any reference to fitness, with the result that parties were divided in the proportion of 500 on the one side and 50 on the other. Passing from its composition to its actions, Mr. Asquith said that while a Tory Ministry was in office the function of the House of Lords as an impartial check on the legislation of the Commons was absolutely suspended; the country was practically governed by a single chamber. He instanced the case of the Irish Coercion Act of 1887, which had to be forced through the House of Commons by the ruthless application of the Closure, but which was passed with a few hours' discussion in a single night by the House of Lords. Mr. Asquith contended that a truly impartial assembly in such a case would have given the bill prolonged examination.

In his other speeches he also referred to the manner in which the House of Lords dealt with the Home Rule Bill, which after occupying the House of Commons for eighty-two days was disposed of in four days by the Upper

Chamber, and rejected by a majority with the proportions of ten to one, which he said it was impossible to affirm correctly represented the feeling of any district in the United Kingdom. The great bulk of that majority was present not to listen to argument or to discuss the bill, but for a much simpler task, "the automatic registration of a foregone conclusion". The record of the House of Lords, if examined, would show that for the last sixty years it had judged measures not with reference to their character or their objects, but with reference to the quarter from which they proceeded. He was not surprised at the House of Lords rejecting a measure of capital importance framed by a small majority. "I should as soon expect," he said, "to see the sun rise in the west, and should as soon expect to see the Clyde flow back to its source, as to see the House of Lords give any other reception to a measure so fathered and so favoured." He answered the argument that the Liberal party ought to devote all its energies to social reform instead of tinkering with the constitution, with the effective reply that driving power was no use unless the machinery would respond to it, and reforms that were needed could not be achieved so long as the action of one of the legislative chambers was neutralised by the other.

It is worth noting that it was upon the subject of the House of Lords that Mr. Asquith delivered what many experienced observers have pronounced to be the best debating speech from a party point of view that he has ever made. The occasion excited great public interest, and there were present in the House the Duke of York and an unusual number of Peers. The event arose out of an amendment, moved by Mr. Chamberlain on 10th February, 1895, to the address in reply to the speech from the Throne. The burden of Mr. Chamberlain's speech was an attack on the Government for remaining in office, which they did, he said, simply for the purpose of "filling the cup" for use in their campaign against the House of Lords. Mr. Asquith immediately followed Mr. Chamberlain, and remarked that it was very peculiar that the right hon.

member for West Birmingham should move this amendment, because he knew perfectly well that the first work of the Government in the present session would be a measure for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Wales, a question which Mr. Chamberlain had declared ten years ago to be the most urgent of political reforms, but which in the amendment before the House he desired to set aside, in preference for a vote of censure on the Government on the question of the House of Lords. "I am not going to indulge in a wealth of quotation," said Mr. Asquith, "and I will content myself with citing a single passage from the speech delivered by him before the general election of 1885. These were the memorable words he used: 'I have no spite against the House of Lords, but as a Dissenter I have an account to settle with them, and I promise you I will not forget the reckoning. I share your hopes and aspirations, and I resent the insults, the injuries and the injustices from which you have suffered so long at the hands of a privileged assembly.' I ask the particular attention of the House," continued Mr. Asquith, "to the words which follow: 'But the cup is nearly full'. Yes," added the Home Secretary, "filling the cup, the right hon. gentleman told us to-night, was the latest electoral device. It is at least ten years old, and the credit for the introduction into our political vocabulary of this most useful and picturesque simile ought, I think, to be claimed by its true and original author." Resuming the quotation from Mr. Chamberlain's speech, Mr. Asquith proceeded: "'Yes, the cup is nearly full. The career of high-handed wrong is coming to an end. We have been too long a peer-ridden nation.' Now I should be glad to know," continued Mr. Asquith, amid convulsive laughter from all parts of the House, "what my right hon. friend thinks has happened to the cup which was nearly full in 1885, and how he explains that in his view the House of Lords, which, as he told the electors then, had 'sheltered every abuse and protected every privilege for nearly a century,' has become, as he apparently thinks it has, the last refuge of popular liberty."

Mr. Asquith continued to deal with the remainder of Mr. Chamberlain's speech in the same trenchant and vigorous style.

The occasion was a great personal triumph for the Home Secretary. The interest of his audience never flagged to the end of his speech, and he roused the House to a high pitch of excitement and to great outbursts of feeling. His speech only lasted forty-five minutes, but every sentence told. The biting ridicule of his comment on the quotation he used with such consummate skill, the sarcastic inflection of his voice, the keen relentless way in which he minutely examined and pitilessly exposed the inconsistencies of his opponent, were rendered doubly effective by the jubilant cheers of the Liberals and the half-smothered laughter of the Conservatives. Mr. Chamberlain was tackled on his own favourite ground of the *tu quoque*, and answered with his own favourite weapon of biting ridicule, with the result that he was decisively beaten. "Toby, M.P." in *Punch* aptly summed up the encounter as follows: "*Business done.* Set-to between the Birmingham cock and Yorkshire-cum-Fifeshire bantam. Odds at first in favour of the veteran. Admitted on both sides that the young 'un beat him hollow."

# CHAPTER XIII

## IN OPPOSITION—PART I

ON 8th July, 1895, Mr. Asquith issued his election address for the impending appeal to the country brought about by the defeat and resignation of the Liberal Government, and the consequent dissolution of Parliament. The address was as follows :—

GENTLEMEN,

For the fourth time I have the honour to ask your suffrages. During the three years which have elapsed since you last elected me I have been continuously engaged, as a member of the late Liberal Government, in the endeavour to give practical effect, in the sphere of administration as well as in that of legislation, to the principles which, from the days of our first connection. I have professed and you have approved.

These efforts have not been fruitless. The Local Government Acts for England and Scotland, which have for the first time given self-government to the parish; the Finance Act, which has gone further than any previous measure towards an equitable adjustment of the burden of taxation as between industry and property; the Fatal Accidents and Sea Fisheries Acts for Scotland, which have carried out, though in the latter case in an incomplete and mutilated form, changes of great interest and urgency to the Scottish people; the Factories Act, which has added enormously to the safeguards of life and health in all industrial occupations; these are but the most conspicuous items in a long catalogue of useful and beneficent laws, the incorporation of which in the Statute Book, at the initiative of a Liberal Government, and by the votes of a Liberal House of Commons, sufficiently refutes the ridiculous calumny that we have been too absorbed in promoting schemes of political innovation to find time and energy for the work of social reform.

In our administration of the affairs of the Empire, abroad and at home, I claim for us that we have maintained peace, improved the national defences, opened out new markets to British trade, introduced and given effective recognition to higher standards of duty in the relations of the State to those whom it employs, and exercised, with an energy and to an extent unknown before, the powers which the Government possesses to better the conditions of labour and to protect the life and health of the working classes.

It is true that much of what you and I hoped in 1892, and of what the late Ministry has since attempted to realise, remains unperformed. Ireland is still without those powers of self-government in respect of her internal concerns which we believe to be the best safeguard for the unity of the kingdom and for the efficient conduct of Imperial affairs by the Parliament at Westminster. The liquor traffic is still free from popular control. Religious inequality is still protected and guaranteed by law, even where, as in Scotland

and in Wales, it is most plainly repugnant to justice and to national sentiment. The question of Employers' Liability—in settling which the object to be aimed at is not so much compensation for accidents, which can rarely be adequate, and must often be wholly nugatory, as the prevention of avoidable injury of life, health, and limb—has, nothwithstanding our strenuous endeavours to solve it on the lines approved by the vast majority of the workers of the United Kingdom, been put aside by the action of the House of Lords.

If, as I believe, you are as earnest in your desire for the accomplishment of these and other reforms as you were in 1892: if you still prefer the policy of political and social development, which the Liberal party has plainly defined and steadily pursued, to the shadowy and ambiguous promises by which the Coalition Government is attempting, without alienating its Tory followers, to bid for Radical and even for Socialist votes; if, in a word, you remain true to the unbroken political traditions of Fife, I ask you once more to entrust your interests to my charge.

I am,
Gentlemen,
Your faithful servant,
H. H. ASQUITH.

For the next ten days Mr. Asquith worked with great energy, visiting and speaking in all parts of his constituency, and addressing as many as seven meetings in one day. His usual practice of inviting questions at his gatherings was greatly abused during the election, and he was regularly subjected to a prepared inquisition, organised for the purpose of disturbing his meetings. With characteristic geniality, Mr. Asquith dealt patiently with these remarkably curious electors and gave them the information they required, with a little to spare. Many of the questions asked bordered on insolence and plainly revealed the motives which prompted their authors. One meeting in particular simply consisted of an exchange of words between the speaker and his audience.

The air of East Fife, like that of the rest of Scotland, apparently contains a peculiar microbe which tickles the curiosity of the inhabitants at election times to a remarkable degree. At any rate, it is evident that the electors in Mr. Asquith's constituency view their electoral privileges in an extremely serious light, and are not bashful in ventilating their grievances. There are not many members of Parliament born south of the Tweed who would solicit questions under such conditions, and with the knowledge that they would be asked in broad Scotch. But Mr. Asquith is well qualified to take care of himself, and his good temper is not easily exhausted. That his constituents trust him

and appreciate his frank and manly character is evidenced by the support they extend to him.

The polling took place on 19th July. The Unionists were confident of victory, but the result of the poll completely falsified their over-sanguine expectations. The figures were as follows: Asquith, 4332, Gilmour, 3616, Liberal majority, 716.

The victorious candidate briefly expressed his thanks to his supporters for their "unabated and unconquerable fidelity". The majority showed an increase of 422 compared with the last election in 1892. This was all the more satisfactory as the general election as a whole resulted in a great victory for the Unionist party. The returned Conservative and Liberal Unionist members combined numbered 411 against 177 Liberals and 82 Irish Nationalists, giving the Unionist party a parliamentary majority of 152 votes.

Mr. Asquith was not at all daunted by the greatness of the Liberal disaster. He proceeded at once, both in the country and in Parliament, to vigorously criticise the new Government and to inspire the Liberal party with courage and hope. He minimised the extent of the electoral catastrophe by emphasising the fact that it was largely due to electoral anomalies, and he prophesied that the Conservative reaction would only be of normal duration.

A very pleasing episode in the career of Mr. Asquith that occurred on 16th August, soon after the close of the general election, was his visit to his native town of Morley to open a new Town Hall. Mrs. Asquith accompanied her husband and took part in the proceedings. They were accorded a good hearty reception of the kind Yorkshire people always give to those they delight to honour, and the inhabitants from the Mayor downwards joined together to show their cordial appreciation of their distinguished townsman, in whose brilliant career they took an exceptional pride and interest.

An event that excited in Mr. Asquith the keenest indignation and the gravest fears was the famous and fateful Jameson Raid. To a statesman like Mr. Asquith, who

cherishes above all else the good name of his country, and whose greatest sorrow is to see its great reputation besmirched by indefensible acts of aggression, which give material to England's detractors to attack her good faith, the revolutionary outburst of the South African Jingoes was an act of criminal folly.

Speaking on 11th May, 1896, at Trowbridge, he said: "It was impossible for any one who reflected on that most reckless and foolish enterprise in the light which had since been thrown upon its real objects and motives without feeling that it had inflicted irreparable injury and dishonour upon British interests in South Africa. It had dried up naturally and legitimately the sympathy of the civilised world with the admitted grievances and wrongs of the foreign population in the Transvaal. It had opened a rift which it might take years and possibly even a generation to close between the English and Dutch populations in that part of the world, when, upon their close and cordial co-operation the victory of civilisation and barbarism depended, and what was far worse than either, it had cast a stain upon the moral title of Great Britain to be the paramount power in South Africa, and had exposed us to a situation almost grotesque in its humiliating incidents, as any one might realise who reflected upon the negotiations which had been and were going on between President Kruger and Mr. Chamberlain. The Liberal party during the last three months had forborne from hostile comment, not because they thought that the policy of the Government had been either wise or adroit in its methods, but because they had been in complete sympathy with what they had understood to be its purpose and spirit. The events which had happened called for a prompt and searching inquiry."

On 12th October, in a speech to his constituents, Mr. Asquith referred at some length to the report of the Jameson Raid Inquiry Committee. The severest critics of that Committee could not, he said, deny that it had rendered a great service to public morality. The Committee had placed on record with the assent of a number of the most eminent statesmen on both sides of the House

of Commons a condemnation as explicit and as emphatic as the English language could convey of the manner in which that sordid and criminal enterprise was carried out, and a condemnation no less plain of the grave breach of public duty and the treachery to public trust of which unhappily Mr. Rhodes, the then Premier of Cape Colony, had practically admitted himself to have been guilty. Mr. Asquith said he voted against the proposal to censure the Committee, but he felt that the refusal of Mr. Hawkesley at the direct instance of Mr. Rhodes to produce documents which were clearly material to the inquiry, had created an unsatisfactory and humiliating position. He was strongly of the opinion that Mr. Hawkesley should have been brought to the bar of the House, and compelled to disclose any information or papers in his possession which were necessary to complete the work of the Committee. Commenting on the rumours that there were telegrams which, if published, would blast the reputation of more than one eminent statesman, he said he believed there was not one scintilla of truth in such allegations. He could see no reason why Mr. Rhodes, who had received one of the most scathing condemnations from a public committee reported in history, should withhold documents which would be of advantage to him and which would minimise or qualify his guilt. His conclusion was that there was no complicity between the Imperial Government and such an ill-starred enterprise. He could not agree with Mr. Chamberlain's statement that nothing in the report reflected on the personal honour of Mr. Rhodes, because it was incompatible with the prompt action he took at the outset to condemn the Raid and mitigate its injurious influences. The officers who had taken part in the Raid deserved their punishment.

A piece of class legislation which Mr. Asquith strenuously opposed, and which was received with murmurs of dissatisfaction by many supporters of the Government, was the Agricultural Rating Bill. On 1st July, 1896, Mr. Asquith, on behalf of the Opposition, moved the rejection of the bill.

He said that at the general election this proposal for the indiscriminate payment out of public funds for the relief of rural rates had never been dreamt of by a responsible politician. After being battered about on the sea of criticism, it had only escaped shipwreck by being transformed from a permanent into a temporary measure, which they were told was the tentative step in a root and branch reform of our whole system of local taxation. In his opinion the bill was in effect a measure to compensate the landed interest for the Finance Act of 1894. Undoubtedly it would to some extent re-establish the inequalities the Finance Act of 1894 was designed to remove. The bill was of equivocal origin and it mortgaged for five years to come no less than ten millions of prospective revenue, or an equivalent of a penny in the pound in the Income Tax for each of those years, not for the interests of the community at large but for the benefit of a particular class. The third reading was carried by a Government majority of 152.

On 2nd July the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1887 Amendment Bill came up for its second reading. Rising after the Home Secretary, Mr. Asquith said the existing law was wholly inadequate, for the simple reason that experts in the past had confined their attention to the dangers of gas and the collapsing of roofs, and the perils of coal dust had not been accurately gauged. The moment the report of the Royal Commission was presented he considered it his duty to appeal to Parliament to place on the Statute Book a bill embodying the Commissioners' recommendations. It was a matter of regret that he and his colleagues had not been able to carry the bill into law before Parliament dissolved. The bill under discussion contained many of the provisions of the late Government's measure, and he believed it would have the effect of saving hundreds of lives which were at present exposed to avoidable dangers in mines.

An instance of Mr. Asquith's scrupulous fairness in dealing with his opponents was furnished in his speech in Parliament during the discussion of the Civil Service Esti-

mates on 31st July, 1896. He said he desired to acknowledge in the fullest way the complete continuity in the administration of the Home Office. He earnestly trusted that the administrative work of the Home Office, particularly in the sphere of activity which concerned the health and industrial condition of the working population, might come to be recognised as entirely outside the sphere of party controversy, and that any developments that system might undergo would not only be acquiesced in but welcomed and carried on in the same spirit as that in which they had been initiated. He was glad the Home Secretary had added to the number of female inspectors, as under the Factory Act of the previous year a great many provisions, and especially powers dealing with laundries, had been introduced into the law which affected female labour. He was quite satisfied from his own experience that these provisions could not be efficiently enforced except by female inspection.

The Armenian question reached an acute stage during the latter part of 1896, and Mr. Asquith in a speech to his constituents on 1st October discussed the subject from a non-party point of view in a broad and statesmanlike spirit. "What we desire," he said, "is to enable our Government to speak in our name to Turkey and to the great Powers of Europe with the voice of a unanimous and united nation. We know only too well that the mills of diplomacy, however well and skilfully they are engineered, grind very slowly, and that the premature disclosure of the best contrivance and the best-laid scheme may upset its object. . . . The time has arrived when it has become the duty of Europe, acting if possible by the collective authority of all the great Powers, acting if that be not possible by fewer and even by one of them, to put an end by force to the misgovernment and the massacre by the Sultan of Turkey of his Christian subjects. I use the expression by force advisedly. Paper promises on the one side and paper remonstrances on the other have proved equally futile, and the only thing which now stands between what remains of the Armenian people and their total

extermination is the caprice of a single man upon whose conduct the demonstrated impotence of diplomacy has removed the only effective restraint. If Europe is to escape the indelible infamy of having connived at, or having indeed facilitated—because she did not prevent when she might and ought to have prevented—this tremendous crime, there is only one thing to be done, and that is to remove the Sultan from a position in which he can exercise power with such fatal effect. My second proposition is this: if she cannot obtain, I will not say the co-operation, I will not even say the concurrence, but the acquiescence of the great Powers of Europe, Great Britain has in this matter both the title and the power to act effectively and alone. But I add in the third place that no sane person can maintain that it is the duty of Great Britain to assert that right or exercise that power of single-handed action if the result of doing so be to array upon the side of the Sultan, upon the side that is to say of barbarism, of cruelty and of oppression, the active support of the Powers of Europe, and in particular of that Power, I mean Russia, which has always assumed the title of the secular protector of the Christians in the East."

Mr. Asquith then proceeded to review the history of the question. He said that at the end of 1894 and the beginning of 1895 the British Government, of which he was a member, joined with France and Russia in urging the Sultan to institute an inquiry and punish the culprits. For a time all went well, but there came a point at which the employment of force had to be contemplated, and at that moment France and Russia plainly intimated that they could not associate themselves with any measure of the kind.

The speaker went on to say that Russia must see that this country had no axe to grind and that our action was purely disinterested. The immediate object was to provide the ordinary safeguards for life and liberty and a humane existence for the Armenians. The Sultan had forfeited the right to govern his own subjects and the title to engage any longer in the comities of diplomacy. The solution of the problem lay in co-operation with Russia.

On 9th October, 1896, there arose in the Liberal party a crisis that shook it to its foundations, and from which it has only recently recovered. On that date Lord Rosebery, on the ostensible ground of divergency of views on the Armenian question, resigned the Liberal leadership.

On the following evening Lord Rosebery addressed a huge demonstration at Edinburgh. Mr. Asquith was present on the platform, and in response to loud calls he made a speech. He had attended the meeting, he said, to show and testify his loyalty to his chief, and not to speak. He desired, however, to take this, the first opportunity, of saying on behalf of his colleagues, that never for one moment during the three years they had been so closely and intimately associated in political life had Lord Rosebery wavered in the integrity of his character, in the sincerity of his Liberalism, and in his supreme and unrivalled claims to the leadership of the Liberal party. Lord Rosebery had said what was perfectly true, that since the general election of the previous year his colleagues had been in possession of his conditional resignation. On many occasions they had persuaded Lord Rosebery not to resign, but now he had taken that course the present was not the occasion to contradict the decision. The more the Liberal party reflected upon Lord Rosebery's resignation, and examined his policy, the more strongly would they support the conclusion that the decision they arrived at three years ago, that he was the only fit successor to Mr. Gladstone, was a decision which had been ratified by events and which they would still maintain.

Mr. Asquith, in addressing his constituents a few days later, referred again to Lord Rosebery's resignation, which he said had come as a great surprise to his colleagues. He warned his hearers against the idle reports of dissensions in the Party. "I venture to deprecate, with all the emphasis I can command, any discussion of this momentous question which would tend to reduce it to the level of a more or less squalid rivalry between personal ambitions and even personal jealousies."

He argued that as the Liberal party were in opposition and likely to be so for some time there was no necessity for the formation of a new programme. He counselled patience and a firm adherence to the main principles which had characterised the Liberal party throughout its history.

The speech carried weight and had the effect of re-establishing a feeling of confidence in the party. A member of the audience, who shouted "He'll be Prime Minister yet," vocally expressed the opinion which was uppermost in many minds at that time. *The Times*, commenting upon the speech, remarked; "Mr. Asquith it will be observed modestly disclaimed the interpretation commonly and naturally placed upon the prediction which his ex-leader felt moved to utter in his regard at Edinburgh. But although he refuses to assume the mantle which Lord Rosebery was understood to tender to him, he cannot altogether shake himself free from its folds. The advice he tenders to his party is sensible and shrewd, and does credit to his coolness of head in rather trying conditions. The pear he sees is very far from being ripe and he is not of a mind to run the risk of spoiling it. Accordingly he recommends that all indulgence in the squalid rivalry of personal ambitions and personal jealousies should be avoided or at all events should be postponed for the present."

The following speech of Mr. Asquith's may be noted as typical of many in a similar strain that he has addressed to his supporters, and it shows the genuine pride he takes in representing his constituency, and how highly he values the confidence reposed in him.

"It is always to me," he said, on one occasion, "one of the greatest pleasures in my political life to find myself once more amongst my constituents to whose unfailing and unflagging loyalty I owe whatever has befallen me in the political world. I do not believe from the moment of our connection ten years ago even a cloud has ever intervened between us. I trust these relations of mutual goodwill and of loyalty, which have always hitherto sub-

sisted, will never be interrupted, and that so long as I am able to make my voice heard among you, you will continue to give me the support which I value more than any of the other prizes of political life."

During the autumn of 1896 Mr. Asquith rendered a great service to his party by a series of rousing and inspiriting speeches, in which he criticised the policy of the Government, and exhorted his party to maintain its energy and spirit and live up to its great traditions.

Addressing a great demonstration at Leicester, he pointed out that the Liberal party had made it possible for the masses to enjoy greater material comfort, and its record during the last term of office showed that it had the interests of labour at heart. He commented on the speech made by Mr. Balfour at Sheffield on fiscal policy. Mr. Balfour had, he said, made a somewhat elementary discourse on the economics of international trade, and had "explained to Colonel Howard Vincent and others that the normal excess of imports over exports, so far from being a sign of approaching commercial and financial decrepitude, was a very fair test of the profitableness of our international trade".

The speech of Mr. Balfour's here referred to has unaccountably escaped notice in the present fiscal controversy. It is a striking coincidence that this rebuke to the Protectionist tendencies of his followers should have been administered in the same town where his momentous "Sheffield Shuffle" oration was destined to be delivered. Mr. Asquith, with prescient insight into the possibilities of the future, remarked that while Mr. Balfour had explained the A B C of Free Trade for the edification of his followers, there was no mistaking the sympathy which had been manifested in influential quarters of the Conservative party in favour of Protection. What had become, he asked, of Mr. Chamberlain's proposal for an Imperial Zollverein, which in such a light-hearted fashion he had thrown into the air to see which way the wind would carry it? He was afraid it had not met with a very happy fate. This proposal for a purely illusory gain

would have dislocated the whole of our foreign trade and would have given to foreign countries the best possible pretext for retaliating upon us. The scheme had found no favour in any British Colony of any importance except Canada, where opinion was hopelessly and irreconcilably divided. Its significance for Liberals was that they must keep their eyes open and their powder dry in order to defend if called upon the fiscal system initiated by Sir Robert Peel and developed by Mr. Gladstone. Liberals were Free Traders not because they were doctrinaires or philanthropists, but because theory had taught them and experience had proved that for a country like ours Free Trade was the best thing for ourselves.

How amply subsequent events have proved the wisdom and foresight of his exhortation and warning! It was looked upon at the time as almost superfluous, and as an indulgence in the exercise of what is known as flogging a dead horse. But Mr. Asquith prudently recognised that the security of a principle of such tremendous importance to the welfare of the Empire could not be too fully safeguarded, and time has justified his action.

Mr. Asquith referred to the Zollverein project again in the course of a speech on 12th October, 1897. "I am confirmed in the conviction," he said, "the more I study the subject, that one of the reasons which make our Empire this unique aggregation, which has no parallel in the history of the world, not of tributary dependencies relying upon and subject to a central authority but of perfectly free communities which give a voluntary allegiance to a common sovereign—one of the reasons which keep this great fabric together consists in the very looseness and elasticity of the ties which bind them."

He then proceeded in an eloquent passage to give a clear and decided lead to the Liberal party.

"I trust we of the Liberal party," he said, "while we do not yield for a moment to our opponents in our zeal for the maintenance of Imperial unity, or in the value we set on the fidelity, the loyalty, and the attachment of our Colonies, will keep ourselves clear of these fallacious and

heretical opinions, the application of which in practice—which Heaven forbid!—would be found to be the first step, and a very considerable step, in the destruction of British and Colonial trade. We of the Liberal party, having had our share in the original establishment of Free Trade, which has been the main and effective cause in the industrial progress of this country during the last fifty years, would show ourselves not only false to our traditions, but poor students of the principles which lie at the root of our faith, if, in deference to these sophistical and fantastical ideas which have no real substance or value, we were to abandon that which has been productive of such infinite benefit to us, and which, as it spreads slowly and gradually but surely throughout the length and breadth of our Empire, will equally redound to the credit and the prosperity of our Colonies as well."

In the early part of the following year, 8th January, 1897, Mr. Asquith addressed a great demonstration at Dewsbury. Referring to the financial aspect of the Irish question, he said Ireland ought to be treated as "a separate entity". Under the existing system neither Ireland nor Great Britain gained anything. Ireland paid in taxation seven and a half millions. She ought to pay, according to her taxable capacity, no more than five millions, and consequently she was overtaxed to the extent of two and a half millions a year. On the other hand the administration of Ireland costs five and a half millions. If it were an administration such as it ought to be it would cost two or three millions less. The net result was that instead of the contribution Ireland made to the Imperial expenditure being three millions it was only two millions a year. The cost of local administration in Ireland was nearly £1 a head, whereas in Great Britain it was only 11s. 5d. a head. "Such a system," he said, "blesses neither him that gives nor him that takes." The remedy was to lessen the cost of administration and to reduce the Irish constabulary.

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN OPPOSITION—PART II

ON 28th March, 1897, Mr. Asquith presided over what after events have proved to be a historic occasion, namely, the complimentary dinner to Sir Alfred Milner on his fateful appointment as High Commissioner of South Africa. A very distinguished company was present, including among others Mr. Balfour, Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. (now Lord) Goschen, Mr. Morley and Mr. Herbert Warren.

In proposing "Our Guest," the chairman referred to his early associations with Sir Alfred Milner at Oxford. He said that it was indeed a notable occasion which could bring together such a company so diverse in interests, in pursuits and in opinions. If it was true that one of the secrets of happiness was the capacity to enlist and retain friendships, then their guest that evening had cause to be happy. It was now nearly twenty-five years since he and Sir Alfred Milner sat together at the scholars' table at Balliol. They both aspired to practise the profession of the law, but after an experience at Northampton, his friend turned his back upon the Temple and entered the seductive paths of journalism under the apprenticeship of Mr. Morley. Wisdom was justified of her children, and Mr. Morley had no reason to blush for the after success of those who had served under him. Mr. Asquith next alluded to Sir Alfred Milner's candidature for parliamentary honours and his entry into that service where there is "fixity of tenure". It was a remarkable record for a man of middle age to have studied scholarship and metaphysics under Jowett

and Green, the art of writing under Mr. John Morley, to have been introduced to official life by Mr. Goschen, to have learnt the practice of administration under Lord Cromer, and the discharge of the delicate and responsible duties which fall to the permanent head of a great department of the State under Mr. Balfour and Sir William Harcourt. This constituted a unique and fortunate experience, which eminently fitted a man for the discharge of one of the most arduous tasks which a State could call upon any citizen to perform. Sir Alfred Milner had been summoned to undertake such a task by the wise and happy discrimination of Mr. Chamberlain. No appointment had been received with a larger measure of public approbation. Under a strong sense of public duty their guest was quitting a genial and familiar work for a post which was beset with embarrassing problems.

Sir Alfred Milner in his speech referred to his own and Mr. Asquith's connection with the Oxford Union.

Mr. Chamberlain, in proposing the health of the chairman, said that while Mr. Asquith's own party was justified in regarding him as a most brilliant and powerful leader, his opponents were also glad to recognise in him an honourable although a formidable foe. To whatever party they belonged they all rejoiced in the position which he had achieved for himself and which his attainments and character fully deserved.

On 3rd May, 1897, the Home Secretary introduced a bill to "amend the law with respect to compensation to workmen, for accidental injuries suffered in the course of their employment". He described it as a tentative measure.

Mr. Asquith welcomed the bill, as he believed there ought to be some provision in the law of the country to enable a workman injured through no fault of his own to receive some solatium for an injury sustained while carrying on his work as a soldier in the army of industry. The prevention of accidents, however, was of even greater importance than giving compensation.

Speaking on the second reading of the bill, he said he

was prepared to accept the principles of the bill and to extend its scope and strengthen its safeguards. Legislation of this kind was not likely to impose an insuperable burden upon the industries of the country. The shortening of the hours of labour, and the improvement of the conditions of our industrial life would be beneficial to the trade of the country. After describing the German system of compensation, he drew attention to the question of insurance and the liability of employers under the bill. He urged the Government to take the opportunity of abolishing once and for all, as regards all the industries of the country, the doctrine of common employment. As regards the now selected trades the law had remained for seventeen years an elaborated series of traps and pitfalls for the unwary litigant, and had produced litigation which in proportion to its difficulty and cost was absolutely barren of result. By a few words introduced into the bill, the Government could get rid of the doctrine of common employment and confer an incalculable boon upon the large body of workmen who otherwise would be excluded from its operation. While something could be said for proceeding tentatively, he was opposed to discriminating between favoured and unfavoured trades. He cited the case of a man working on a building where steam power was not used. Such a worker if he met with an accident would not be entitled to compensation, while probably his neighbour engaged in a favoured trade would receive a pension for life. There was no justice in such a discrimination.

His object, he continued, was to endeavour to make the bill a complete and workable measure. As at present constituted it was likely to cause jealousy amongst different classes of workmen. The bill would give an enormous impetus to sub-contracting. He pressed on the Government the advisability of inserting a clause similar to the one in the Employers' Liability Bill of 1893, which made the head employer liable. He would like to see a clause inserted bringing within the scope of the bill injuries to health caused by neglect of sanitary precautions on the

part of the employer. This would apply more especially to women engaged in such occupations as the lead and pottery industries.

When the Committee stage was reached, Mr. Asquith watched the progress of the bill night after night with untiring interest. In his capacity of chief spokesman for the Opposition, he rendered a great service to his party, his experience enabling him to point out the weak points in the bill and to suggest many desirable amendments. Experience has since proved that Mr. Asquith's suggestions would have added greatly to the usefulness of the measure, and obviated much needless litigation. The Act will eventually have to be extended to all trades, and remodelled on the lines suggested by Mr. Asquith.

Speaking again on the third reading of the bill the ex-Home Secretary said he still adhered to the principle of universal compensation, and regretted that the Bill would not abolish the doctrine of common employment. The fact that about 60 per cent. of the working classes would derive no benefit was a great blot on the bill. A splendid opportunity had been lost by not making the bill more comprehensive.

The House of Lords proposed a number of amendments, some of which were keenly contested by the Opposition in the Commons. The proposal to strike out sub-section 4, which made it incumbent upon the employer to meet any deficiency in the payment of compensation, brought a spirited speech from Mr. Asquith. He criticised the inconsistency and weakness of the Government in giving way to the Upper House, and urged that workmen should not be deprived of the full benefit the clause would give them. Some smart passages at arms occurred between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Chamberlain. The latter, during the discussion of the bill, had referred to the clause as a fair and reasonable one, but now at the dictation of the House of Lords he reversed his opinion.

Mr. Asquith paid a high tribute to the municipal work of Glasgow in a speech on 6th December. He said no municipality had a higher reputation for enterprise and

efficiency. Social experiments had been tried in Glasgow which would be denounced as the extremes of Socialism and Collectivism if attempted in London. Mr. Asquith laid great importance on the opportunities municipal work offered to men of ability and experience to serve their fellow-citizens.

The second reading of the Prisons Bill brought an interesting speech from the ex-Home Secretary. He said prisoners should not be treated as if they all belonged to one class. There were difficulties in a policy of discrimination but it had great advantages. He was in favour of doing all that was possible to enable prisoners to earn relaxation and additional comforts, physical and intellectual, in order that they might make the best of their time, and prepare themselves so far as they could for a better and more useful life on their release. Prisons were not intended to be comfortable places and punishment must not in becoming reformatory cease to be deterrent. Subject to that overruling condition it should be the first end of an enlightened system of prison administration not to add to the loss of liberty any superfluous degradation or quench any flickering sparks of self-respect.

Referring to the Spanish American War, on 3rd May, 1898, he said: "My sympathies are and have been from the first entirely and heartily with the United States. There are always people who can see in great movements of national feeling nothing more than the disguised operation of selfish and sordid forces. I believe that in their resolution to put an end to the cruelities and abominations which a system of incurable misgovernment has inflicted upon Cuba the American nation in responding to the demands of humanity and liberty are setting a worthy example to the great Christian Powers of the world."

On 10th June, 1898, Mr. Asquith made a remarkably able speech in the House of Commons on foreign affairs, full of the most penetrating criticism of the Government's vacillating policy. He showed how utterly inconsistent were the declarations of Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain, and severely commented on the reckless language in which

the latter had abused Russia as our inveterate enemy and fulsomely eulogised Germany as our natural friend.

The speech abounded in passages of the loftiest eloquence. In one of these he said: "If hostility to Russia is to be the end of our foreign policy, is an alliance with some unknown Power to be the means? Again I ask, what have we done? What have the people of Great Britain done or suffered that, after bearing as we have borne for over fifty years the ever-growing weight of empire on our own unaided shoulders, and borne it without finding the burden too heavy for the courage, enterprise, and self-reliance of our people, what have we done or suffered that we are now to go touting for allies in the highways and byways of Europe?"

The *Daily Chronicle* made an interesting comment on the speech. "Mr. Asquith," it wrote, "is the dark horse of the House of Commons. Whether from reserve or modesty he speaks rarely and does not frequently travel outside the beaten track of his own subjects. But there is always a sense of reserve power about this quiet deliberate debater. Last night he surpassed himself. It is no mere praise to say that it is the best speech Mr. Asquith has delivered in the House of Commons. There were passages in the speech which rose to a high point of eloquence, and were received with those instantaneous, instinctive bursts of cheering which mean that a party has at last found a voice to speak the thing it thinks."

Mr. Asquith has never ceased to be an ardent advocate of establishing the closest and friendliest relations with the United States. Speaking on 9th September, he said the year 1898 would be remembered as the year which witnessed the drawing together of the two great English-speaking races, not in a mere gust of transient enthusiasm, but by a strong and durable bond. Common blood, common language, common law, common religion, were facts which united the two nations. It had long been the aspiration of the best men both in America and Great Britain to bring about a better understanding between the two peoples. That which until a year ago seemed to be a

dream had been consolidated and as it were crystallised by the pressure of events, until it was now a firm and vital reality. Mr. Asquith paid a tribute to the efforts Lord Salisbury had made to promote a permanent treaty of abitration. He also eulogised the work of Colonel Hay, the American Ambassador.

Mr. Asquith visited his constituents on 13th October, and discussed the Irish Local Government Act, which he thought was a good measure, but in some particulars as they affected the landlords he should like to have seen the bill amended. He was opposed to granting doles to landlords, whether they were Irish or English. Now the Act had become law he hoped it would work equitably.

The resignations of Sir William Harcourt and Mr. John Morley attached a special importance to Mr. Asquith's visit to Birmingham on 16th December, 1898. The National Liberal Federation was holding its annual meeting in the town the same day, and Mr. Asquith's speech was eagerly expected. A crisis in the history of the party seemed imminent, but the late Home Secretary rose to the occasion and delivered a great and reassuring speech. The outlook was extremely discouraging for the party, with first Lord Rosebery as the great Imperialist and then Sir William Harcourt and John Morley as the great protagonists of a peace policy unable to find it possible to remain within its councils.

Mr. Asquith proved himself to be made of sterner fibre than his colleagues, and instead of showing the white flag, he urged his fellow Liberals to sink their petty differences and to unite in furthering the great objects of the party. His abilities as a statesman and a leader were never seen to better advantage, and by friend and foe alike it was admitted that he averted what looked like an ugly rupture, and gave confidence to his party. On this critical occasion, as on others, he clearly demonstrated that he was the safest and most trusted leader in the Liberal party, and that he held more than any one else the esteem and confidence of Liberals in the Commons and throughout the country.

He opened his speech by referring to "the remarkable correspondence," and said he deplored the retirement of Sir William Harcourt with sincere regret, just as two years ago he had deplored the resignation of Lord Rosebery. Every public man, he went on to say, must judge for himself what he conceives to be due to his own dignity and self-respect. He announced that he had no personal aims for the vacant position, and he strongly deprecated the prosecution of imaginary candidatures. He continued: "There is no hurry, and it is far better for all the interests concerned that no one at this stage should commit himself to any particular course until the air has been cleared and the situation has begun to define itself. The matter is one which concerns the House of Commons alone, and whatever decision our party in the House may come to, the person selected will, I undertake to predict, receive, as he will certainly need, generous and unwavering allegiance, not only of his colleagues upon the front bench, but of every section of the rank and file. Leaders come and go, but the party remains. I do not—which of us can—disparage the magnitude of the personal losses that we have sustained. It is no light thing, that a party which was in 1895, to use Sir William Harcourt's phrase, 'a defeated army, diminished in numbers, denuded of some of its most stalwart fighters,' tried first by the withdrawal from the scene of action and now at last by his death of the most illustrious captain of our century—illustrious no less for his patient tenacity in the dark hours of adverse fortune than in the rush of his irresistible advance in the noontide of victory. It is no light thing, I say, that a party so situated should within two years have lost the leadership of the two men who, under conditions of unparalleled difficulty and depression, continued the succession, and courageously carried on Mr. Gladstone's work. We who remain have to accept the past, to make the best of the present, and to prepare for the future.

"The question, and I think the main question, that we ought to ask ourselves at such a moment is this: Are we so rent by sectional disputes and conflicting interests

that we cannot present to the country an intelligible policy and a united front? There are those, I know, who think that the personal considerations which have come so prominently to the front in these unhappy controversies only cloak deep-seated and far-reaching divisions of principle and of purpose. They tell us that the burden of embarrassment, real or imagined, to which one leader after another has yielded will be found to involve the complete paralysis of our party. Liberals of Birmingham, I ask you is this so? Are we, we of that party of progress, who for more than one hundred years, through evil and through good report, have upheld in policy and in legislation the cause of freedom, the rights of the common people, the unending struggle between justice and privilege—are we going to sheath our swords and to lower our flag because upon this point or that of priority or precedure we cannot come to a unanimous agreement? I say no. It may be that the skies are overclouded, the tide ebbs away from us and leaves us for the moment, though for the moment only, in the shoals. What is that to men who have faith and hope and that which is the best inspiration of both—the assured promise of the future?"

The *Daily News*, commenting on the speech, said: "Mr. Asquith delivered a capital fighting speech. He fought the Tories, not his fellow Liberals. Let us hope his example will be followed by others in every grade of the Liberal army."

On 21st February he spoke in favour of seamen being entitled to compensation under the Employers' Liability Act of 1880. He said of all classes of working men in this country seamen required the most protection and yet had the least given them. The difficulty of obtaining evidence of a disaster at sea was no greater than procuring evidence of a colliery disaster.

The subject of Old Age Pensions came up for discussion in the House on 24th April, and resulted in a sharp contest between Mr. Asquith and the member for West Birmingham. Mr. Chamberlain having in one of his plat-

form speeches alluded somewhat cynically to the Liberal party's connection with Old Age Pensions, Mr. Asquith reviewed the history of the question, and in the course of his speech quoted a number of passages from Mr. Chamberlain's speeches by which he proved that he, more than any other statesman, had made promises to deal with the question. Mr. Asquith said that Mr. Gladstone's Government appointed a Commission in 1892, which made a number of recommendations, but owing to the state of the country's finances it was found impossible to carry them out. Mr. Chamberlain had promised Old Age Pensions and yet, although the Government to which he belonged had during the three subsequent years had a surplus of twelve millions, not a half-penny had gone to provide Old Age Pensions. That question having served its purpose during the 1895 election was now to be relegated to neutralised territory which it ought never to have left. He was glad of an opportunity of protesting against the fortunes of a great social question being subordinated to the petty exigencies of party.

In a speech on 23rd March, in which he opposed the second reading of the London Government Bill, Mr. Asquith said the reconstruction of London government would not be complete without adding to the County Council representative authorities to administer the local affairs of the various districts. A sound, statesmanlike course would have been to have amalgamated the City Corporation and the County Council so far as the Corporation had functions over property and prerogatives in which London had a common interest, and to substitute for the existing Vestries, District Councils acting within such areas and equipped with such functions as he had described. The effect of the bill would be to create a set of new authorities indefinite both as to number and area, which were to have the style and status of Municipal Boroughs, a false title, because it produced a false analogy, and suggested a false idea. There was only one community in the Metropolis which answered that description and that was London as a whole. After a critical analysis of the

bill, he concluded by describing it as a scheme to surround and buttress an unreformed city with a ring of sham municipalities, and to impair and destroy in the most material particulars, the greater administrative unity of London as a whole.

One of the worst examples of Tory class legislation introduced by Lord Salisbury's Government was the Tithe Rent Charge Bill, which was strenuously opposed not only by the whole of the Opposition but also by some of the more liberal-minded men in the Unionist party. On 27th June, 1899, Mr. Asquith rose to move the rejection of the bill, and said that it had been sprung upon the House late in the session, and immediately after the issue of the Royal Commission's interim report, which gave no countenance to the proposals of the Government. The bill proposed to distribute £87,000 amongst 11,000 clergy, an average of £8 a head. The clergy who paid the highest rates would get the bulk of the money and the poorer clergy would only benefit to the extent of about £3 to £5 each. The distress of the clergy was not due to excessive rating, but to the fall in value of agricultural produce. The income of the clergy should not depend upon such a fluctuating security. The bill provided relief to the clergy of the richest communion in the world, not at its own expense, but at the expense of the taxpayers of the country. Not by such means would either clergy or the Church benefit. In the name of justice and sound policy he asked the House to reject the bill.

Mr. Asquith has on numerous occasions severely condemned the extravagance of the Unionist Government. While he believes that a strong navy is necessary as our first line of defence, he holds to the view that the expenditure on the army can be safely reduced, and yet at the same time the efficiency of our forces can be considerably increased. Speaking at Hull on 28th January, 1903, he said the increase in our normal expenditure during the past seven years, quite independent of the war, amounted to no less than forty millions. He did not grudge the money spent on education, and he recognised that a strong and

efficient navy was the real secret of home defence. When we came to the military expenditure, however, a totally different state of things existed. There was much to be said in favour of better pay and improved barrack accommodation for our soldiers, but most of our military outlay was due to the radically unsound conception that, for the purpose of protecting our shores from invasion, it was necessary always to keep in the United Kingdom a large army of regular troops. Mr. Asquith proceeded to condemn the army corps scheme, which he described as costly, retrograde, and of no practical value. If we had extravagant expenditure, he added, we must expect, as a corollary, to have unjust and oppressive taxation .

When the navy estimates came up for discussion on 23rd March, 1903, Mr. Asquith dissociated himself from the suggestion that the number of men for the navy could be safely reduced. Speaking three days later at St. Alban's, he said we were a naval and not a military people. There were two vital considerations which must always determine our naval expenditure. The one was the amount of hostile force that, by any reasonable probability, could be arrayed against us, and the second consideration was the extent of the protection which we have to offer our mercantile marine, to ships bringing here that which was of vital necessity to the daily life of our people, and the problem the navy had to solve was to provide a force which, having regard to those two sets of responsibilities, would be able adequately to discharge them. Liberals did not grudge the money spent, provided it was spent for those two great objects, which, as he had said, were vital.

It was a very different matter when they came to the army. No nation had ever been both a great military and a great naval power. This country did not need a larger regular army for home defence. What it needed was a development of the auxiliary forces. The notion apparently entertained by Mr. Brodrick and his friends was that we must have 120,000 regular troops fit for immediate mobilisation in this country, but it was one of the most absurd delusions that ever entered into the minds of men.

We did not want it and what was more we could not get it. Such a force existed at this moment only upon paper, and it never would exist except upon paper unless we largely increased the soldier's pay and did what he was certain the commonsense intelligence of the country would never consent to, resort in some form or another to compulsory service. It was a shame and a delusion kept up for purposes wholly unnecessary and indeed incompatible with any true theory of Imperial defence.

The most recent subjects on which Mr. Asquith has come into strong opposition to the Government have been the importation of Chinese miners into the Transvaal and the Government's Licensing Bill.

On 21st March, 1904, he supported a vote of censure on the Government for advising the Crown to allow the ordinance for the introduction of Chinese labourers into the Transvaal. This Chinese labour, he said, in no way merited the name of free labour. The Transvaal was at present really an inarticulate community and its expression of opinion was easily manipulated. This step once taken would be very difficult to retrace. They ought not to heedlessly ignore the practically unanimous remonstrance of all the self-governing Colonies against this ordinance. He expressed the opinion that if they avoided hurried action, allowed time for the operation of healing forces, offered good wages, and secured favourable conditions to the labourer, the most serious features in the economic situation would soon be removed. Suppose they were to resort to outside labour, he repeated the question which had been put several times, and had not been answered—Why not go to India? Both for gold mines, coal mines, and iron mines, they would find amongst the Indians a most serviceable and handy set of men. They had not gone to India because they knew very well that if they made any such proposition as was made to the Chinese Government it would have been rejected without a moment's hesitation. If this same ordinance had been passed by the Volksraad under the regime of Mr. Kruger, would anybody on the Ministerial benches have shrunk from the

use of the word "slavery?" And was it not morally certain that President Kruger's attention would have been called to the eighth article of the Convention of 1884, to the effect that "no slavery, or anything partaking of slavery, would be tolerated by the Government of the South African Republic?" They might call it what they liked, but the plain fact remained that, without any clear mandate from the Transvaal itself, in defiance, as he believed, of that country and of the Empire at large, they were by means of this ordinance putting in jeopardy the whole of South Africa.

It is unnecessary to deal at length with Mr. Asquith's speeches on the Licensing Bill, as we have stated his views on temperance reform elsewhere. In Parliament he acted as the official leader of the Liberal Party in its opposition to the bill. He performed his duties with great vigour and ability, and was splendidly supported by his followers. He completely exposed the evils of the bill and its real origin.

Speaking on the second reading, he said the bill was really a redemption of the Prime Minister's pledge to a panic-stricken deputation of brewers, pleading against the predatory justices, and threatening the Government with unpleasant consequences if they did not come to their protection. The whole bill was constructed in the fear of the brewers' political power, and with no consideration for the interests of the country. He condemned the transference of licensing from the Local Justices to Quarter Sessions, and advocated the total abolition of appeals to Quarter Sessions, which he said were appeals on a purely local matter from a body on the spot to a body at a distance. He pointed out the utter inadequacy of the compensation fund provided in the bill, and how anything like a reasonable reduction of public houses was thus rendered impossible. He also condemned the means proposed for raising the compensation fund, which he said should be supplied solely by the "Trade," and not by a revision of the anomalies of the licence duties which ought to go to the relief of taxation. He pointed out that the bill would give the rich

brewers compensation twice over through the enhanced value of the remaining houses, while the tied licence-holder would get nothing. He strongly urged the introduction of the principle of the time limit into the bill, and said that it was absolutely vital to the consideration of the measure. In concluding his speech he said: "I believe the bill will exaggerate most of the evils of the existing system, and I am certain it will interpose fresh and insuperable difficulties to a fruitful and permanent settlement of the most pressing of our social problems".

Mr. Asquith has declared in the most emphatic manner that the bill is unconstitutional and will have to be repealed. He points out that it has not been submitted to the electorate, and has not even been properly put before the country. Neither the nation nor Parliament have been allowed fair time to discuss it, and it is quite certain that the country disapproves of its principle. Mr. Balfour's cynical disregard of the rights of the people or of Parliament, and his disgraceful subservience to the power of the brewers, have provoked what has assumed the proportions of a national protest, for condemnation of the bill has not by any means been confined to one party. In all parts of the country, leading public men of all shades of opinion have joined in the opposition.

On the 6th July, 1904, the first night when Mr. Balfour's guillotine motion came into operation, there were angry scenes in Parliament. Mr. Asquith rose to speak a few minutes before the guillotine was to fall, and was received with resounding cheers by his party. In a short but most emphatic and powerful speech he condemned in the strongest language Mr. Balfour's tactics. He showed conclusively by Mr. Balfour's own admissions and the amendments accepted by the Government that there had been no obstruction, and Mr. Balfour stated that he did not allege it. Yet the bill was being closured, though of the twenty-one lines that composed clause one only six had been discussed, and there were still fifteen pages of amendments which were not to be discussed at all. "By passing this

revolutionary proposal undiscussed," he said, referring to the compensation scheme, which he remarked was after all the vital and essential principle of the bill, "the procedure of the House of Commons is being reduced to a farce, and members are making themselves accomplices in the caricature of representative Government and the betrayal of the spirit of parliamentary institutions."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

THE closing months of 1899 were stirring times in the nation's history. Since the Jameson Raid the darkening outlook in South Africa had increased in gravity, and the autumn of 1899 saw this country and the Transvaal near the precipice of war. Calm counsels were needed to stay the appeal to arms, but obstinacy and mistrust gradually made a settlement by diplomatic means an impossibility.

Mr. Asquith had condemned the Raid, but he recognised that the Uitlanders had a genuine grievance which demanded reform. Speaking on 3rd September, 1899, he said no British Liberal could contemplate with satisfaction a system under which large numbers of our own countrymen were denied some of those civil and political rights which were the necessary equipment of a civilised country. The Boers were a conservative nation, but there were signs that the reforms which were needed would be granted by degrees. Owing to the Raid the Boers feared that Great Britain had ulterior designs upon their country. That was one of the obstacles in the way of a speedy settlement; the other was that the promises made by the Pretoria Government were held by some to be ambiguous and insincere. Although the situation was a delicate one, he had faith in Sir Alfred Milner. The outbreak of war would be a reproach to statesmanship and an incalculable disaster to South Africa.

Speaking on the day the Boers despatched their ultimatum, he said he had credited the Government with

having striven to avoid war, but the ill-inspired despatch of the Transvaal Government had created a new situation. It meant simply: Was Great Britain to remain the Paramount Power in South Africa? Was she to secure for her subjects in the Transvaal the same equality of treatment granted to Dutch and English in every other part of South Africa? It was an issue from which we could not flinch. We were bound to take it up. He wished to dissociate himself from the view that the war had an ulterior object—the subjection of the Boers and the annexation of their country. Such an intention had been emphatically denied by the Government. The vast majority of the thinking people of this country had contemplated war with reluctance and aversion, but now it had been forced upon us we should see it through to the end.

Addressing his constituents he said it was the duty of politicians irrespective of party to show a united front in the emergency the country was called upon to face.

On 26th November, in a review of the causes of the dispute, he said that when we gave back in 1881 its independence to the South African Republic, the gift was made not for a section but for the whole of the inhabitants. The equal rights which Mr. Gladstone had intended should be given to all had been monopolised to the special and exclusive privilege of a minority. Largely through the criminal folly of the Jameson Raid, which paralysed whatever was progressive in the Government at Pretoria, and gave free play to all its most reactionary elements, the governing body by the lavish use of resources mainly contributed by the disarmed majority, had equipped themselves with a fighting strength with which it now took 60,000 of the best troops of the British army to cope. What was the condition of our fellow-subjects in the Transvaal? They were taxed without representation, subjected to laws in the working and administering of which they had no effective voice, and deprived of the two alternative remedies, votes and arms. It was all-important that the two white races in South Africa should live on friendly terms. That could only be brought about by

the giving and receiving of equal rights and by reciprocal self-respect. Mr. Gladstone had on one occasion said to him, "I am persuaded there is nothing more permanently demoralising to a community than passive acquiescence in unmerited oppression". If that was a sound doctrine, continued Mr. Asquith, it should apply to those who suffered under unequal laws. The ultimatum, he went on to say, had all the signs of remarkable and elaborate preparation. Diplomacy had perished in an atmosphere of suspicion, and we were fighting to resist an invasion. Mr. Asquith concluded an eminently patriotic speech by eulogising the work of the troops and the sacrifices made by Natal and Cape Colony.

He was one of the first to recognise the magnitude of the task before our forces, and he urged that nothing should be left undone to expedite the end in view, and to thoroughly equip the troops at the front. Speaking on 17th December, 1899, he said it would be idle to deny that there were many points in the preparation, the organisation, and the strategy of the campaign which excited widespread and serious disquietude, and which ultimately must become the subject of searching inquiry, but in such matters nothing could be more unjust than to give publicity and currency to hasty impressions founded upon imperfect information. To seek to undermine the confidence of the country and of the army in a gallant general, on the strength of a single error of judgment, or a single reverse in the field, was to take upon oneself a great responsibility. It was an equally wide if not a more serious departure from the lines both of patriotism and of justice to make suggestions not by open attack but by covert insinuation as to the loyalty of the Government of Cape Colony, which, under the stress of an almost inconceivable strain, had heartily exerted itself to check the spread of disaffection. This contest had developed proportions which might make it the turning-point in the fortunes of the British Empire. If we failed in the tenacity, the patience, the resolve, the equanimity by which in days gone by we had won and kept our dominion, the

British Empire would cease to be a going concern. But we were not going to fail. But if we were to succeed, and to succeed honourably, one or two practical considerations must be kept in view. It was no use underrating the magnitude and the direction of the task we had got to discharge. It was plain now that we had to fight an enemy whose actual numbers largely exceeded any estimate hitherto formed, who had apparently still an abundant supply of all the munitions of war, and which, so long as it could choose its own ground and adopt its own tactics, was as nearly invincible as any army we read of in history. It was pretty clear that our force was inadequate for the work which it was called upon to perform. Whatever accession of numbers was needed to give our army an irresistible superiority and strength, however great might be the sacrifices involved, the country would not only readily sanction, but confidently expect. He did not suggest that there was any reason to fear that the British people would lose heart or hope; nor was there any sign of the decay or disappearance of that traditional equanimity which in darker days than these had enabled us to present to an unfriendly world an unbroken and an impassive front. But there was danger lest the memory of these mortifications and humiliations where success was assured should tempt us to forget or to divert the avowed purpose of our policy. No one could doubt that the end of this war would be followed by a large rearrangement of the pre-existing political system in South Africa, and that it would then be our right and duty to provide adequate safeguards against the recurrence of dangers to which we were now exposed. But let them not forget that we were fighting to assert the supremacy of British power and not to secure the ascendency of a particular race, and that the future of South Africa depended upon the creation of a workable and permanent *modus vivendi* between the two great white peoples which there lived side by side. For the moment their duty as a nation was to be united and resolute.

Speaking at Oldham on the 24th July, 1901, Mr.

Asquith reviewed the situation in South Africa. He said there was no ground for the exaggerated pessimism about the war which seemed to prevail in some quarters. In not inconsiderable parts of the field substantial progress had been made, and was being made, towards the establishment of peace and the restoration of order; but after two years we had an army of no less than 200,000 men in the field, an army of which Englishmen might say with pride, and were bound to say with more emphasis at a moment when the whole of Europe was ringing with the vilest calumnies against our troops, that in courage, in endurance, and in humanity it had never been surpassed in the annals of warfare. Against us we had not less than 100,000 men in arms.

Without distinction of party they all longed to see the war brought to an end. No one wished for a polished-up and illusory truce which would render futile all the sacrifices of the last two years, and leave us after it all face to face with the old problem. No one, on the other hand, if an effectual and honourable peace could be attained, desired to pursue this conflict in a spirit of revenge, or to humiliate or exterminate our gallant enemies. If there were such a person his head was even more to be pitied than his heart. It was with the Boers that we hoped and intended to build up the fabric of a free South Africa. Every one desired to put a speedy, honourable, and effectual end to this conflict. The question of paramount urgency was how can that best be done? The main thing to ascertain when answering that question was—Why does the struggle continue? What are the Boers in the field fighting for?

If we might trust the authorised declarations of their recognised leaders, they were fighting for the thing which, by universal consent, they could not have—independence. We could not recognise such a claim after the experience of 1892. Annexation with fair treatment for the conquered was the only possible policy. Mr. Asquith expressed regret at the spread of Anglophobia on the Continent. He believed in the essential righteousness

of our cause, though he believed it could have been presented with greater discretion by the members of the Government.

Although a supporter of the war, Mr. Asquith continued to criticise its management, and in a crowded House on 18th March, 1902, he strongly supported the demand for a thorough inquiry. He asked for the inquiry he said in no factious spirit. There was a strong *prima facie* ground for an inquiry the object of which should be to fix upon those who were responsible their share of responsibility for the shortcomings of the past and to provide against the recurrence of mistakes in the future. Mr. Balfour, who followed, remarked that the speech he had listened to had raised the tone of the debate.

The end of the war came at last. The conclusion of hostilities was hailed with universal joy. The terms of settlement had Mr. Asquith's support and that of the Liberal party generally.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LIBERAL IMPERIALIST

MR. ASQUITH was one of the founders of the Liberal League, and during recent years he has striven with great energy and ability to foster the growth of a sane imperialism. At a critical period in the history of the Liberal party, when there seemed a tendency of some of its leading members to rush to the extreme of jingoism, Mr. Asquith in face of the ridicule of his opponents and the murmurs of many of his friends, boldly declared himself a Liberal Imperialist, and in conjunction with Lord Rosebery and others, he made a strong effort to save his party from attaching itself as a whole to any policy which was capable of being misrepresented as unpatriotic by its opponents.

The step was not a pleasant one to take, but the exigencies of the situation demanded prompt and decisive action. By the unscrupulous use of political clap-trap of a peculiarly nauseous type, a large part of the electorate had been misled into the belief that the patriotism of only one party in the State was to be trusted. Mr. Chamberlain had strained his powers as a popular orator to the utmost in a determined effort to utterly discredit his opponents as hostile to the closer union of the mother country and the colonies, and to the development and extension of the Empire.

In this disgraceful movement, Mr. Asquith saw that a great danger threatened not only the Liberal party but also the honour and prestige of the nation, and he worked

indefatigably to expose the utter falsity of Mr. Chamberlain's shameless accusations. He pleaded for a saner, more statesmanlike and less aggressive view of our imperial responsibilities.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chamberlain's campaign of misrepresentation was aided by some absurd exhibitions of anti-English sentiments by the Irish members and other nominal followers of the Opposition, and the situation became so serious and complicated, that Mr. Asquith and those of like mind with him were at length reluctantly forced to the conclusion that there was no other course open to them but to form a Liberal organisation with the special object of proving that the truest imperialism and the truest patriotism were of the very essence of Liberalism, and that our whole colonial system was founded on the bed-rock principles of Liberal policy.

Mr. Asquith has been keenly criticised for the action he took, but time has proved that he acted for the best, and by carrying his convictions into practice, he rendered an incalculable service to his party and the country. Imperialism to Mr. Asquith is not synonymous with aggression. The most devoted lover of peace could not find fault with the imperialism he has advocated. While holding strongly to the belief that everything should be done to promote the growth of the colonies, and to secure the loyalty of our kinsmen across the sea by drawing the Empire still closer together, he does not forget what is due to the toiling millions at home. To prove worthy of our great imperial heritage, with its attendant responsibilities, and yet at the same time to maintain peace, is the kind of imperialism Mr. Asquith has so powerfully supported. His imperialism was no sudden new growth, but the resignations of Sir William Harcourt and Mr. Morley brought his views on the question into greater prominence and caused him to pursue a more decided course.

Mr. Morley had stated that certain members of the Liberal party had caught the plague of jingoism and allied themselves to a policy of militarism and the creation of international jealousies. Speaking a few days later, on

20th Jan., 1899, Mr. Asquith said that such a great indictment demanded serious examination. He had supported the Government in protecting our interests at Fashoda because he believed we were in the right. We had done a great imperial work in Egypt. A long stretch of wasted and depopulated country had been restored to civilisation and to the rule of justice, order and liberty. A desolating tyranny had been swept away, and a great waterway had been opened up. Was he as a Liberal, he asked, guilty of logical inconsistency and of political infidelity if he rejoiced at these results?

He passed on to define his view of imperialism and the Liberal party's attitude towards the question.

"I agree entirely with Mr. Morley's definition—it could not be improved—of true imperialism, in contrast to the absurd and spurious kind of which we have seen so much. We cannot, he said, make light of our engagements and obligations, neither can we allow other states to make light of the engagements and obligations into which they have entered with us, but let us, Mr. Morley continued, measure our natural strength, let us cast our eyes forward, let us comprehend as many as we can of the consequences. In a word, imperialism, in this higher and better sense, must be tested and limited by common-sense. That expresses, I believe, the practically unanimous conviction of the whole of the Liberal party throughout the length and breadth of the country. What does it come to when translated from general to concrete terms? It means assuming no responsibility which we have no means of discharging; swallowing (to use Lord Rosebery's phrase) no more territory than we can properly and comfortably digest. Remember that every addition to our territorial or to our imperial obligations is a fresh hostage given to fortune, and a new point of possible attack. I see Mr. Chamberlain, in a speech last night, has been venturing to define a Little Englander. He tells us a Little Englander is one who believes expansion carries with it obligations out of proportion to its advantages. I am not a Little Englander. I have come across a fair number so styled in my time. Some of my best friends

have been erroneously nicknamed Little Englanders, but I never yet met the most extreme of my friends who would subscribe to Mr. Chamberlain's definition in that crude and unqualified form. I would rather say, slightly altering Mr. Chamberlain's form of words, that the true imperialist, who professes the gospel as laid down so admirably by Mr. Morley in his speech the other night, is the man who believes in such expansion only as carries with it advantages not out of proportion to its obligations."

On 21st May, 1900, the debate on the Australian Commonwealth Bill drew from Mr. Asquith what the *Birmingham Daily Post* described as "one of the most animated, eloquent and truly imperialistic speeches it has ever been the fortune of the House of Commons to listen to." Mr. Asquith said it was a measure which, by reason not only of its intrinsic importance, but also of the influence which its adoption must exercise upon the future of the Empire, transcended in interest and in magnitude almost any legislative proposals of our time. The Australian States had grown from infancy to manhood almost within living memory, and each had developed a character and individuality of its own. All alike had contributed to the strength and vitality of the Empire, but the Australian Commonwealth of the future was a whole which they believed was destined to be greater than the sum of its component parts. The settlement which had been arrived at reflected equal honour upon the Colonial Secretary and the Australian delegates. He looked to the constitution of a real Imperial Court of Supreme Appeal—a court not to be forced upon the colonies against their will, but of such a character that every part of the Empire would regard it not as a favour, but as a privilege. They wanted a court so authoritative, so weighty from its numbers, from the attainments of its members, that all our large dependencies, when questions arose such as were certain to arise, would look upon it as a tribunal of unsuspected impartiality, and an authority which no local court, however great might be its qualification, could by any possibility become. Under

the circumstances, the constitution of such a tribunal would be one of the best links by which we could maintain the unity of the Empire as a whole.

The confidence which members of the Liberal party and especially those who defended the war have in Mr. Asquith received a remarkable expression during 1901. The imperialistic element in the party found in him its leader. Without in any way arousing an invidious feeling, he placed his services at the disposal of this imperial section. To show their appreciation of his able support, a number of his admirers gave a complimentary dinner in his honour on 19th July. Sir Edward Grey presided and amongst those present were Lord Brassey, Sir Henry Fowler, Sir Walter Foster, Mr. Haldane and a large number of Liberal M.P.'s.

Sir Edward Grey in proposing the health of Mr. Asquith said : "Mr. Asquith and I are practically Parliamentary contemporaries. I remember his maiden speech in the House of Commons, and I remember the comment of one newspaper after the speech was made, which was that the House of Commons paid him the compliment of listening to him as a leader. Please do not say that I said the leader, or you may get me into trouble But what the newspaper meant was that he had taken immediately a front rank amongst debaters in the House of Commons. I have never seen front rank so quickly taken. I have never seen it more nobly held than he has held it. We passed our early days together in the House of Commons in the Liberal party, and we shared the same political opinion very closely, which occasionally took the form of motions or bills which I believe were not always very convenient for the front bench of the day. But that may have been consoling to the people who sat behind the front bench of the day. Their vitality may not always be convenient, but it may lead to good work. This dinner has arisen from the desire of many friends whose minds have been in close touch with Mr. Asquith for many years, who have delighted to lean upon his counsel and judgment and hear the opinions which they shared with him gain added

force from the expression he gave to them—this dinner has arisen from the desire of those friends to express their feelings towards him. I remember the occasion which originated the idea of this dinner was a speech which he made not long ago on the subject of South Africa—a speech which swept across the field of politics like a fresh breeze, encouraging and inspiriting everybody who shared his opinions about the war. The war is still the great question of the day. There is first of all the great moral question on which every one must make up his mind, and having made up his mind must express his mind. Is your country in the right or is it in the wrong? All I would say on that is this—that those who have taken the view that their country was to blame in this matter, and who feel upon themselves a strong moral compulsion to express their views, must feel that the moral compulsion is at least as strong on those who believe their country to be in the right."

Mr. Asquith, on rising to respond, was greeted with great enthusiasm. After a humorous reference to the criticisms that had been made of the project of the dinner by the newspapers that were opposed to the war, who had attempted to attach a sinister significance to the occasion, he said: "None the less am I grateful, and grateful with all my heart, to those—and I speak especially for the moment of my friends and colleagues in the House of Commons whom I see seated at this table—none the less am I grateful to them that, in the face of infinite misunderstanding and misconstruction, they have displayed a staunchness, a constancy, and a confidence that will never be effaced from my memory. I confess as I look around me I do not see any of the conventional signs of a conspiracy in the spectacle which meets my eyes. Here we are, in the fierce glow of the electric light, having apparently forgotten to bring our cloaks and our masks and our daggers. I see even my friend Mr. Haldane, that notorious intriguer, a man of the blackest antecedents, who does not seem to have made any attempt to disguise his appearance. Here we conspirators are prepared to confide

our dark designs to the receptive ears of the British press. Well, I am delighted to see around these tables the faces of so many tried and representative Liberals from all parts of the kingdom, and I know, from abundant communications which have come to me from every quarter, that there are many who are compulsorily absent, but who are present with us to-night in spirit and in sympathy.

"What is the attitude of the bulk of Liberals to the British Empire? Do they look upon it as a regrettable necessity, to be apologised for as half blunder, half crime, or to be acquiesced in as an inevitable and unwelcome addition to the load which weighs down the stooping shoulders of the weary Titan? It would be strange if it were so. Empire is a word that means different things in different mouths and to different ears. But what does it mean to us Liberals? It does not mean a syndicate for the exploration and exploitation of the races of the world. It does not mean a mere commercial partnership, founded on the basis of profit and loss. It does not mean simply a mutual insurance society for the protection of its members against external attack. Its significance and its value to us are this—that with all its failures and shortcomings, with all its weak places and its black spots, it is the greatest and the most fruitful experiment that the world has yet seen in the corporate union of free and self-governing communities.

"The Empire, as we know it, was built up largely by the foresight, by the labours, by the efforts of Liberal statesmen. Its central and vitalising principle, the attainment of imperial unity by means of local autonomy, is in entire harmony with the traditions and principles of the Liberal party. We are not compelled to borrow either the principles or the vocabulary of our opponents. But, believe me, this is not merely a verbal or an academic question. It frequently happens that we meet here eminent Colonists, Colonial politicians and statesmen, who have come from the great democracies of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where the prevailing, the predominant, opinion of the people and of the Legislature is Liberal in the strongest sense of the term, and where they are carrying out, day

by day and year by year, democratic reforms upon a scale and with an uncompromising idealism that would stagger the most progressive thinker in this country. They all say to me: 'How is it that you, the Liberal party of Great Britain, with whose social aspirations and whose legislative programme we are in complete sympathy—how is it that you have allowed your opponents to monopolise and exploit for their own party purposes the name and prestige of the Empire?' If the Liberal party is to become, as I believe it can and might be made, not only the dominant political force in this country but the acknowledged centre and fountain head of Liberal ideas throughout the length and breadth of His Majesty's dominions, we must be firmer in our faith, or at any rate, more articulate in its expression. That I believe to be the first step that has to be taken if the Liberal party is to win its way to the predominance which it deserves. But—and here comes the essence of Liberal doctrines—such a conception of Empire and of our relation to it, will be found not to paralyse but to stimulate all those aspirations and efforts which we include under the general name of social reform. It is the work of statesmanship in this country to make the Empire worth living in as well as worth dying for. In the long run every society is judged and survives according to the material and moral minimum which it prescribes to its members. What is the use of an Empire if it does not breed and maintain in the truest and fullest sense of the word an imperial race? What is the use of talking about Empire if here, at its very centre, there is always to be found a mass of people stunted in body, a prey to intemperance, huddled and congested beyond the possibility of realising in any true sense either social or domestic life? Here we come to the great work in the truest sense of the term of Empire-building which the Liberal party, and which, as I believe, alone the Liberal party is equipped to discharge."

Mr. Asquith concluded a truly great and memorable speech with an appeal for unity and a national aim. He asked: "What is the sum of the whole matter? It is this. If the Liberal party is to succeed it must appeal to sober-

minded and level-headed men in all strata of humanity and in all quarters of the King's dominions. It must first convince the people that it is a national party, to which they can safely entrust the fortunes of the Empire, and next, and not less important, that it is the Liberal party, distinguished in tradition, in principle, in spirit, from those to whom it is opposed, which neither fears nor favours classes or interests—the party which strives everywhere and at all times to enrich the national character and intelligence, to widen the range of opportunity and to raise the standard of life. It is in that spirit that I ask you one and all here to-night to renew your fealty to the Liberal cause."

The speech created a good impression in the country and won the support of many who had been led to believe that the Liberal party was indifferent to imperial questions. It arrested the secession from the party of many adherents, who, misled by Mr. Chamberlain's audacious assertions and misrepresentations, had become persuaded that the imperial destinies of the country would be unsafe in the custody of a Liberal Cabinet.

Mr. Asquith attended Lord Rosebery's great meeting at Chesterfield, and in a brief speech supported the views of the ex-Premier. A few days later, on 19th December, he journeyed to Bilston to speak for Mr. Henry Norman, M.P. He said it was a matter of the highest gratification that Lord Rosebery had again stepped to the front to give counsel and leadership in a moment of great national emergency. He adhered to the policy laid down at Chesterfield both on its critical and constructive sides and without any substantial reservation. Mr. Asquith condemned "the organised rowdyism" in Birmingham on the previous night which had resulted in the Lloyd-George Riot. He insisted on freedom of speech for all sections of the community.

The differences in the Liberal party reached an acute stage with the opening of 1902, and in a candid speech on 16th January, Mr. Asquith denounced paltry backbiting. He said that it was only by every man taking the spade in his own hands and doing his share of work that the Liberal party could recover its ascendency in the country.

Towards the end of February, as a direct result of the Chesterfield speech, the Liberal League was formed. Lord Rosebery was elected President and Mr. Asquith, Sir Henry Fowler and Sir Edward Grey accepted the positions of Vice-Presidents. The object of the League, whilst acting with the rest of the party, was to popularise the principles of Liberal Imperialism and to advance the policy propounded by Lord Rosebery at Chesterfield.

Mr. Asquith's acceptance of a Vice-Presidency was only to be expected after his series of speeches on the war and his consistent advocacy of imperialism. He recognised the need for an organisation to develop the imperial element in the Liberal party, and with this desire in view, and with no thought whatever of disloyalty to his party, he helped to found the Liberal League, which has since so amply justified its inauguration by doing a great and necessary work for Liberalism.

Fully conscious of the importance of the step he had decided upon, Mr. Asquith addressed a letter to his constituents explaining his action and recapitulating his political creed as it affected the questions of the hour. He wrote :—

"Recent events in the history of our party appear to me to make it my duty, as I am unable at this season to visit my constituents, to lay before them, my own views of the situation. I dismiss all the personal questions of which we hear and read so much as wholly irrelevant. I can honestly say that no considerations of the kind have ever influenced my judgment or my conduct. There have, during the last two years, been sharp differences of opinion among us on the subject of the war in South Africa. Lord Rosebery rendered a signal service both to the party and to the country when, by his speech at Chesterfield, he defined a common ground upon which, at this stage of the conflict, the great majority of Liberals were able to meet. Repudiating with indignation the charges which have been made against our officers and men, and criticising with just severity the manifold shortcomings of the Government, both in the methods of their diplomacy and in their con-

duct of the campaign, he maintained the necessity of prosecuting the war with all possible vigour and effectiveness, and, at the same time, keeping our ears and our minds open to any overtures for peace which might hold out the hope of an honourable and durable settlement. I believe that this view is held in substance by the bulk of our party, and, if so, our agreement upon it ought to concentrate and consolidate our criticism of the Executive.

"But while it is the first business of an Opposition to watch and criticise the proceedings of the Government, it has a second and scarcely less important duty, to convince, and, if it can, to convert, the judgment of the country. For that purpose it must have an administrative and domestic policy of its own. It is ten years since the Liberal party last came into possession of a parliamentary majority. It grappled courageously with an extended programme, which every one now acknowledges to have been of unmanageable dimensions. No practical politician with whom I am acquainted proposes to repeat the experiment, and meanwhile the world has been moving, proportions and perspectives have shifted, new problems have advanced into the foreground, old problems have changed their position and have to be approached by a different road. Is it not the duty of the Opposition to take stock of the new situation, to put on one side the unattainable and the relatively unimportant, to combine its efforts upon a few things which are at the same time weighty, urgent, and within reach? This is what I understand by the doctrine of the 'clean slate,' as set forth at Chesterfield. It is the same doctrine which I have preached to you for years past in less picturesque language—the doctrine of selection and concentration."

He then proceeded in unambiguous language to make absolutely plain his position in regard to the Irish question. This portion of the letter is included in the chapter devoted to Home Rule.

The manifesto continued as follows: "The Liberal party, in my opinion, must convince the nation not only that it is a national party which looks upon the Empire as a trust, but that it is able and willing to concentrate its

energies upon the removal of the evils which are at this moment the main hindrance to the discharge of that trust. An increasing number of thinking people are coming to see that it is vain to look to the present Government and the present Parliament, either for a real overhauling of our administrative machine, or for a genuine policy of social reform. We press in vain even for prompt and specific inquiry into their miscalculations, abuses disclosed by the war, imperfect and unorganised education, waste of ability and opportunity, intemperance, bad dwellings, overcrowded districts, vicious systems of tenure, the unjust incidence of rating. These are real and present dangers to the Empire, and yet what has been done that was worth doing during six years of unexampled opportunity to remove or to mitigate them?

"Here are matters about which Liberals ought to be agreed and ought to be in earnest. I trust and believe that their practical efforts may be helped by the new organisation which has recently been formed, not for the purpose of developing and inflaming differences, but to press forward Liberal work in the country upon the lines and in the spirit which I have endeavoured to describe."

The annual dinner of the Liberal League was held on 31st July. The victory of Mr. Barran in North Leeds was celebrated with great enthusiasm. Lord Rosebery delivered a fighting speech in which he referred to the significance of the election and criticised the Government's policy. Mr. Asquith, who followed, said in his opinion the Liberal League was founded not as an instrument of Liberal division, but, as they hoped and believed, as an auxiliary to Liberal revival. He would not have associated himself with any political organisation which included among its purposes aggressive action against fellow Liberals. Now that the war was over—and he hoped these particular differences were at an end—it might be asked for what purpose did the League continue to exist. First, it was the rallying-point for the great body of Liberal opinion in the country, which no one now would, he thought, dream of saying was not entitled to make itself

heard fully. But there was a still more imperative purpose. It was the best means they could devise of bringing into political activity some of the latent forces of Liberalism in the old country. The League had succeeded in no small measure in bringing back to the old colours, to the old party, a not inconsiderable number of those who during the last ten or fifteen years, if they had not finally taken off the uniform, had, at any rate, retired from active service in their ranks.

Mr. Asquith visited his constituents on 5th October. He said he was desirous of seeing a great comprehensive party, the limits of which would be wide enough to embrace all shades of opinion and all who were willing to fight for the great principles of Liberalism handed down to them by their forefathers. Within the last three months he had been offered a seat in an English constituency, but he had declined the invitation. He had represented East Fife sixteen years, and as long as they cared to have him as their representative, he would remain.

Speaking a few days later he said the Liberal League was founded with a twofold purpose—defensive and aggressive. On the one hand, its object was to assert and to maintain the right of those who hold certain views as to Liberal policy and Liberal methods, and to give expression to them within the ranks of the Liberal party. That was an object which it had completely achieved. On the other hand, it was intended to be, and it was, an aggressive organisation, not to make war upon fellow-Liberals, not to supplant, but to supplement, existing agencies, to endeavour by every legitimate form of propaganda to bring the mind of the country to a better understanding of Liberalism, and to rally round it that reinforcement, both of opinion and sympathy, without which it would never recover its old supremacy in the councils of the nation and in the policy of the Empire. They had abundant proof that it had not worked, and was not working, in vain.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HIS VIEWS ON GENERAL SUBJECTS

SO diverse are the activities of modern life, and so manifold are the agencies for human service, that it is well-nigh impossible for a public man to meet all the demands made upon his time and energy. He is called upon to preside at social gatherings, to speak learnedly to innumerable societies on the salient points of their pet subjects, and on all occasions to plead for philanthropic causes and religious and social work.

Mr. Asquith has always shown himself willing to support any movement which has for its object the intellectual development and social betterment of the people. Essentially a man of the people, with broad sympathies and large-hearted views, he has never spared himself in the service of his fellow-men. He is fully justified by his services in being described in a very real sense as a "public man" and one of the nation's most sagacious advisers. During his career he has spoken upon many subjects other than those immediately concerned with politics. The Salvation Army and the select university gathering have both welcomed his presence and support. Mr. Asquith is conversant with the lives of the people and the hopes of the younger generation. It is such knowledge which qualifies him to lead the public thought and direct the affairs of State.

Speaking of the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835 at Leeds, on 30th October, 1893, he said: "Our municipal history of the last fifty or sixty years is the most complete and ample vindication which any of the statesmen

who projected that great measure could have desired of the foresight and sagacity of the lines upon which it was formed. . . . We have often been told that politics ought not to be allowed to interfere with municipal elections. I do not agree with that view. I believe it is only by the recognition that the same large principles which separate us in Imperial matters are equally real, equally genuine, equally vital, equally effective when we come to local and municipal matters; I believe it is only by bringing to bear on municipal contests the same wealth and exuberance of interest which we experience in the larger world of Imperial politics that we can expect purity of administration and obtain the services of the best and worthiest of our fellow-citizens. What is the municipal programme of the Liberal party at the present moment? It has two branches. In the first instance we believe it to be the duty of the municipality to provide the necessary environment for a healthy social life for the community and the industry by which it exists. The housing of the working classes, the clearing away of slums and rookeries, the provision of public baths and wash-houses, the maintenance and enlargement of open places for fresh air and for free recreation, and the establishment of libraries and reading-rooms, free of cost, where everybody may obtain, regardless of his social position, access to the best sources of information, not only as to what is going on in the world at the present moment, but as to all the wise thoughts and wise words of the great men of the past. All these things are necessary in a community which is self respecting, healthy and progressive. Why do we say they ought to be provided by the municipality? Because experience shows that they are things which you cannot trust to the undirected and unorganised action of free competition. Philanthropists may act here and there, public-spirited individuals may leave money and devote their fortunes to municipal and general purposes, but these are accidents, and to the chapter of accidents the development of a great community ought not to be relegated. We therefore hold it is the duty, as it is the interest, of a municipality, to bring into unity

the organised forces of the community in order to improve the conditions of everyday life."

Mr. Asquith went on to refer to the question of labour employed by municipalities. He asked: "Was it the duty of the municipalities to go into the market and buy labour at the cheapest rate, regardless of moral and social considerations? That was the doctrine of the old economists. It is not a doctrine which accords with the views of the English people as we now know them. We believe there is between employer and workman a bond which cannot be accurately expressed in mere terms of money. We believe there is a social duty on the part of the employer to regard, when he is considering the terms on which labour is to be secured, the possibility of the labourer living a wholesome and civilised life. And if that is the case between individuals how much more binding and sacred is the obligation when the employer is not an individual, but expresses the corporate expressions of the opinion and the will of the whole community. . . . There is no labour—as every employer of experience knows—which in the long run is so costly as ill-paid labour. The passion for and the pursuit of cheapness defeats itself, and it is only by giving to your workmen a reasonable remuneration —by which I mean a remuneration consistent with his living a humane and civilised life—that you can secure either for the individual or for the State the best energies and the best intelligence of the working classes of the country."

In opening a course of University extension lectures at Gresham College, on 11th October, 1892, Mr. Asquith paid an eloquent tribute to the memory of Tennyson. He said: "I think we may safely say that in the whole history of English literature there is no writer any of us have read, of whom it may be more truly said that he kept in unsullied purity that great instrument, the English language; that he used it always and used it only as a noble vehicle of noble thoughts. Two full generations of Englishmen have found in his verse refinement, solace, inspiration, and when to-morrow he is laid at rest in the great Abbey, the whole English-speaking race, without distinction of latitude or of

allegiance, will recognise that in our time our language has been spoken by no more stately and no more melodious voice."

In a speech at Plymouth in April, 1894, Mr. Asquith referring to the power of the democracy, said: "In this country public opinion and popular conviction when they are profoundly stirred are too strong a force to be manipulated by the most cunning devices of politicians. Democracies like individuals have their moods. There are times when they are disposed to push on full steam ahead; there are other times when they are inclined to go half speed, and there are moments of reaction, very temporary, very transient, when they almost seem to stand still. But depend upon it the one security for a really safe system of government in the conditions under which we live is this: that our political institutions should faithfully reflect the spontaneous and unadulterated opinion whatever for the time being it may be of the great mass of the community. We desire a democracy not gagged by so-called safeguards, not maimed by technical restraints, but a democracy full-grown, articulate and self-determining. Be assured in these days it is the only instrument by which we can hope to effectually deal with the manifold evils and injustices of our existing social life. . . . We desire to see this power a real power, and the responsibility a living responsibility, because we believe that in the organised action of men who make and maintain the law which they themselves obey, there is the best and indeed the only way to that improvement of social conditions and that larger development of individual opportunity which we believe the future has in store."

One of the most interesting of Mr. Asquith's addresses was the one he delivered on "Criticism" to the students of the London Society in April, 1898. At the outset, he asked what was the meaning of criticism and what were its functions and limits. In the eyes of a great number of people a critic was nothing more than a censor; and a critical attitude was equivalent to disparagement. In fact, criticism was only another name for the science of finding

fault. One saying of Lord Beaconsfield that "the critics are the men who have failed in literature and art" expressed a view which was neither uncommon nor unnatural. A great artist may be incapable of criticism, and a good critic may be incapable of creation. Criticism in the true sense has a positive as well as a negative function. By discrimination between that which is true and that which is false, between good and bad art, between reality and imposture, by dethroning the ephemeral idols of fashion and recalling the wandering crowd to the worship of beauty and of greatness, criticism plays the part of a vitalising and energising force in social and intellectual progress. It performs the double duty of solvent and stimulant. The business of criticism, as Matthew Arnold says in a well-known passage, is "to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known to create a current of true and fresh ideas".

There were three essentials, continued Mr. Asquith, to which trustworthy criticism should conform. It must be catholic, impersonal and imaginative. Partisanship was fatal to the wholesome exercise of the critical faculty, and it was a sure sign of the degeneration of the critic when he lapsed into habitual use of catch-words and formulæ. Criticism should aim at a disinterested appreciation of whatever is worthy or unworthy in its subject-matter and should not be merely or mainly a pretext for the display of the resources of the critic. . . . "Whether you are judging a book, a picture, a character, or a movement no one now dreams of denying that it is the first duty of the critic to put himself as far as may be imaginatively at the point of view of his subject and to take into account the antecedents which led up to and the atmosphere which surrounded its production, and not be a party to that worst form of *ex post facto* legislation which imports modern standards of thought and taste into our judgments of the past."

Mr. Asquith went on to impress upon his hearers the need for practice if effective criticism was to be produced, and to illustrate his point he said it was a good habit to write

a careful criticism of any book which had left an impression on the mind. He concluded his eloquent discourse with a brilliant peroration.

"It is a truism, but a truism which needs to be constantly repeated, that we are too apt in all departments to adjust our judgments to the vulgar modern rule of 'payment by results'. The disinterested pursuit of truth and beauty is always and everywhere the worthy goal of the best energies of the sons of men. In all ages and countries, under every condition of social and intellectual environment, those who have struggled whether for the extension of the boundaries of knowledge or for the widening of the field of common refinement and general happiness, have always found at the end of their journey that there still lay before them, and before those who were to follow—

> That untravelled world, whose margin fades,
> For ever and for ever when we move.

"There is no intellectual formula that can express and no scientific crucible that can resolve the ultimate and irreducible secret either of our individual or of our corporate life. But by close and daily intimacy with the best that has been thought and said we may nourish that temper 'of admiration, hope and love' by which, as Wordsworth tells us, we really 'live'. We may believe that the same power which declares itself in the ordered procession and the imperturbable sequence of the phenomena of Nature, operates with an increasing purpose in the thoughts, the arts, the actions of men, and those who in Bacon's own spirit of humble but trained and indefatigable effort aspire to penetrate their causes and to unravel their tangled meaning may not irreverently seek for a like benediction to seal and consecrate their work."

Mr. Asquith visited Toynbee Hall on 19th January, 1900. He delivered an interesting speech in which he said he was glad of the opportunity to say a few words as he could look back with pleasure to his early connection with Toynbee, which was at that time in its infancy. The University extension movement had set itself to meet

the needs of the ever-growing number of young men and women in the Metropolis who desired to continue their education after business hours. A marvellous transformation had resulted. Avenues to culture had been opened up in almost all the waste places of London, and tens of thousands of young men and women who were absolutely unprovided for thirty years ago, now attended classes, read text-books, got up subjects, passed examinations and obtained certificates and prizes. London owed a debt of gratitude, hardly to be expressed in words, to men who like the Warden had done so much for culture and democracy. There was in London a certain danger of intellectual enervation in the very copiousness of the educational resources with which the London of to-day was endowed, and the path was now made so easy and pleasant that he feared there was a falling off from the strenuousness, the unselfishness, and the concentration which study in harder days used to demand. To avoid that risk he urged them not to aim at a roving acquaintance with a large heterogeneous number of subjects, not to be content with half knowledge, and always to remember that dilettantism was the caricature and enemy of culture. It was a sign of real progress in education when one got to know what one need not remember.

Mr. Asquith advocated the claims of Toynbee Hall at Balliol College, Oxford, two years later. He said it was almost ten years since he had pleaded to a University audience on behalf of Toynbee Hall. Those who knew Arnold Toynbee felt there could be no more fitting tribute to his memory than this institution, which worthily and for all time perpetuated his name. Twenty-five years ago, the notion of planting a colony of University men in one of the darkest parts of the East End of London had an air of novelty, if not even of romance. The so-called practical men, who were always with them, sniffed at it with contempt, or smiled at it with compassion, according to the state of their digestive organs. Now they had Church houses and Nonconformist houses; they had University settlements and College settlements, and Public

School missions; and it might almost seem that the whole of East and South London was dotted about with these reforming agencies. He agreed that in matters of this kind there ought not to be competition; there ought to be co-operation. He did not know that any of these agencies actually overlapped or invaded another's sphere of influence; far be it from him to attempt to bring them into rivalry, or to establish any comparison between their respective claims to the sympathy and support of this University. He would venture, however, to say one thing about Toynbee Hall, and it was this, as compared with some of the other agencies of the kind, he suspected that the very fact that Toynbee Hall was conducted, as it always had been, on a catholic and comprehensive basis, that it had never attached itself in any way to any denomination, either religious or political, might to some extent obscure or impair its claims for the support of successive generations of undergraduates. To his mind, that was one of the great merits of Toynbee Hall. He did not believe the work it performed could be otherwise carried on than by men who, subject to the control of one central and dominating purpose, represented the largest possible diversity of taste, interests and opinions. He did not believe that any experiment that had been made in their time had been better justified by its results than the establishment of these settlements. There were many forms of work—political, social and philanthropic—which yielded such a fitful and dubious crop of fruit that at times they taxed the enthusiasm and tried the courage of even their strongest adherents. That had not been the case with Toynbee Hall and the University settlements. In other spheres of activity they sometimes seemed to think that whatever movement was made was circular rather than progressive. It had not been so in East London. Not the most superficial observer who knew the external condition of things twenty years ago, and knew it to-day, could doubt for a moment that, first of all, the impulse which had led to the enormous change there had been for the better, and next in the guidance which had directed

that change, they had to look to Toynbee Hall and those connected with it as the main source of progress or as large contributors to what had been done.

As the subject of his address at the inaugural meeting of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution on 15th November, 1901, Mr. Asquith chose "Biography as a form of literary art". Good biography like a good biographer, he said, was born, not made. There was no kind of composition for which it was more futile to lay down rules, none in which it was more difficult *a priori* to say why one man should succeed and another with equal knowledge, better brains, and a readier pen, should ignominiously fail. The ideal biographer ought to possess the qualities of a quick observation, a retentive memory, a love of detail, and a dash of hero worship. They could also say negatively that it was not in the least necessary to the production of an immortal biography that the writer, or for that matter the subject either, should be a man of genius; but no theory, either of faculty, opportunity or environment would enable one to explain the supreme art, indefinable, uncommunicable, which created say such a masterpiece as Boswell's *Johnson*. To the true lover of biography it mattered comparatively little how much space the subject of the biography occupied in the eyes of contemporaries, or retained in the judgment of posterity. The interest of the life depended far more on the stature of the man than on the scale of his achievement. It must, no doubt, be admitted that there was a peculiar fascination in trying to pierce through the gloom which veiled the life history of some of the most famous of our race.

It might, he thought, be safely laid down as a maxim of experience without undue severity that few autobiographies were really good literature, and the reason lay on the surface. Self-consciousness was as a rule fatal to art, and yet self-consciousness was the essence of autobiography. No man ever sat down to write his own life, not even John Stuart Mill, without becoming for the time an absorbed and concentrated egotist. The result was too often one of the most unappetising products of the literary kitchen.

Yet in the hands of the true artist there was hardly any form of imposition which had the same interest and charm. That which was at once the most shameless and the most successful specimen of its class was the *Confessions of Rousseau*. The great autobiographies of the world were to be found in many different shades, all worthy of a place in the highest rank. They had one thing in common, they were authentic human documents. In that quality they appeared more vividly, because more directly, than any narrative by any other hand.

Lord Rosebery, who presided, commented at considerable length on the chief points of Mr. Asquith's address.

Mr. Asquith attended the annual dinner of the Newspaper Society on 7th May, 1902, and responding for the House of Commons he delivered a short address, the opening portion of which was couched in a humorous strain.

He said: "I thank you very much on behalf of the House of Commons for the cordiality with which you have drunk this toast, but I tell you at once that in the few observations I am going to address to you I shall say very little about the House of Commons. This is a rare opportunity. And when my friend Sir John Leng did me the honour to ask me to be present as your guest to-night I did not realise as fully as I do now what temptations the position would present to the unworthier passions of one's nature, and I think if I were to comport myself with decent reserve what a severe exercise of self-restraint it would involve. For, gentlemen, I belong, in common with some of my hon. friends whom I see around your hospitable board, and who, in apparent forgetfulness of our new rules, are spending an evening away from the House of Commons—I belong to that unhappy class who are the familiar and the favourite prey of your profession. We are for the most part a quiet, well-meaning set of men with modest ambitions, neither better nor worse, I suppose, than the majority of our fellow-creatures, but condemned by the chances of life to pass a considerable portion of our life in public. What is the result? We are good for "copy".

Our fortunes are to a large extent at the mercy of the Newspaper Society. You report us, or you misreport us —quite unintentionally, of course—or still worse, you abstain from reporting us. By a kind of intuition you have a daily intimate acquaintance with our most hidden and unavowable motives, which, according to your discretion, you share or do not share with the public of the country. You are always pulling us up by the roots and announcing to the less instructed world the signs of growth or of decay. Every morning and every evening we are compelled to know what the Press thinks of the politician. To-night at this banquet, and responding to this toast, I have the opportunity, if I venture to avail myself of it, of telling you what politicians think of the Press. Gentlemen, the temptation is strong—but after the excellent dinner which we have enjoyed I believe I am strong enough to resist it. I will speak for a moment with a little more seriousness. I am told by my friend Sir John Leng that this Society represents some 800 to 1,000 newspapers—even in these days of great combinations a formidable body if, which is happily not the case, it always spoke with the same voice. It would possibly be a mistake to measure the strength of the Press by the number of newspapers produced. I believe it may be said with perfect truth that, regarded as a machine for news circulation and news dissemination, the Press can hardly hope to attain a higher level than it has already reached ; but side by side with that mechanical improvement there has been a corresponding advance in the prestige of journalism. In one respect it is a unique profession, because it contains and always will contain within itself a class of permanent and also a class of transient members. There is not a single man among us—I am speaking now of your guests—from the Prime Minister downwards, who has not at one time or another been a journalist, at any rate as a bird of passage. Journalism is, in fact, the vestibule through which in these days men find access to almost every kind of professional career. There are certain dangers to which the Press has been exposed, and which are infinitely more serious now that the newspaper has become

one of the necessities of life. One is the tendency to partisanship—not only in the advocacy of opinions, but in the manipulation of news. Another is the temptation to be first in the field with one malodorous morsel of personal gossip, which an hour's inquiry would prove an empty and often a cruel invention. And might I venture to say there is a further danger—the danger which recent experience has shown some warning examples in the perilous proximity of the City Office to the Stock Exchange? But I do not dwell on these things. Their insidiousness, their gravity, the fatal effect which, if they were yielded to, they would have upon the influence and the authority of the Press are known to you all. It is because I believe and know, as all of us do, that your members have as their guiding and governing purpose to maintain the Press of Great Britain pure and clean, the organ of popular enlightenment, the bulwark of free opinion, that I thank you most heartily for receiving us here to-night."

Wesley and his work formed the subject of an interesting address by Mr. Asquith at the City Road Chapel, 7th July, 1899. He was not a Wesleyan, he remarked, so he could speak with freedom but perhaps with imperfect information. As a community the Wesleyan body were not indebted to the legislature, and nothing could exceed the value of that spiritual autonomy which they possessed. Although they were now the largest of all Protestant communities, 150 years ago they started from small beginnings, with a demonstrable lack of the external conditions of success. Wesley was one of those men of commanding practical genius whom England from time to time produced, and who placed in any sphere of life would have dominated and inspired his associates. "He had the instinct for government, and he had in a degree which, so far as I know, has rarely been excelled, the faculty of intellectual and moral concentration. Everything he saw, everything he thought, and everything he read—and we know that in his journeys he was an omnivorous reader and we have the excellent authority of Dr. Johnson that he could talk on any subject—he assimilated and compressed

into the service of the great work of his life. When we read that journal of his—one of the unstudied masterpieces of literature, the homely narrative in which from beginning to end there is not a trace of vanity or self-consciousness, to my mind the most simple, the most truly self-revealing of all the confessions of the eighteenth century—when we read that journal, I do not use the language of exaggeration when I say we seem to be following in the steps of one who both in his labours and in his sufferings hardly fell short of the greatest of practical evangelists. He was derided as an enthusiast and a madman. For two generations his name and his work were the target for the gibes of the cultured, and for the coarser hostility of the crowd. For all this, Time, as is its wont, has brought a complete and satisfying revenge. *Si monumentum requiris circumspice.*"

In October, 1901, Mr. Asquith attended the reopening of Lyndhurst Road Congregational Chapel and in the course of an address said that the most striking feature of the religious life of the Evangelical Churches 150 years ago was that it was largely introspective and self-centred, while to-day it was altruistic in the widest sense of the word. "I am aware, that in all times and places both sides of religious consciousness and activity have been developed, but it is true to say that the message of the old Evangelical preacher was, 'Save yourself,' while the message of his successor is 'Save others'. You have here, as I see from the manual, some 1,200 members, and you raised last year a sum of £8,000 in voluntary offerings. I rejoice to find that a large proportion of these members have been engaged, and a considerable amount of the money has been spent, in Kentish Town, where the need is so great. This church is a witness to two facts: (1) The solidarity of London; (2) the growing consciousness of men and women whose lines have fallen in pleasant places that it is their duty to descend from the pleasant heights to the lower levels, and to carry to their neighbours the spirit of community and comradeship."

Mr. Asquith concluded his address, which was delivered

from the pulpit, with the following sound advice: "I don't want the Church to descend into the political arena; but I want it to take a more real part in our corporate life. Here in London we have baptised the old local bodies by a new name. We have mayors with their maces at the head of brand new Borough Councils, and if new Presbyter is not to be old Priest writ large, we must watch their proceedings, and take an active interest in their affairs. We must get rid of the time-honoured out-worn system by which people carry their philanthropic and their municipal work in watertight compartments. We must insist on the highest possible standard of civic probity, if the new London municipalities are to become models of civic life."

On 31st May, 1904, Mr. Asquith responded to an invitation to be present at the laying of the foundation stone of a new institute in connection with Whitefield's Tabernacle, London, of which the Rev. Sylvester Horne had accepted the ministry. In the course of an interesting address Mr. Asquith said: "Many of us here are Radicals in politics, or in religion, or in both. The most Radical amongst us need not be ashamed if we learn from the great men, the great workers of the past. Therefore, in this place it is fitting you should follow in Whitefield's footsteps, that you should imitate his elasticity and freedom of method. This place is to be a home, with the influences and the healthful relationships which gather round a home, for those who, for the time being, are exiled from their native place.

"However much workers in shops and factories may be protected by the law, each has still a personality, a responsibility, a possibility of his or her own. Yet how difficult it is to develop these possibilities in the conditions under which they live. Apart from those coarse temptations, from which they should be protected, the routine of the day and the isolation which envelops them tends to produce an intellectual and moral numbness which renders it difficult, if not impossible, for them to do their duty to the community. Anything which will stimulate these toilers, so little pro-

vided for, who do not appeal to philanthropic effort, for they do not need to be reclaimed, which will make them realise their corporate life, and give them a substitute for a home, renders greater service to the people of London, to the people of England, than could a hundred laws which might be placed upon the statute book.

"I venture to wish you, in the name of all lovers of progress and humanity, God speed! It is the business of social reform not to be content with merely annexing and working in the sphere of duty, but to enlarge its ambition, and take in the whole sum of human activity; providing opportunities to those whom nature and fortune have left meagre and maimed possibilities of contributing their share to the life of the community."

Free libraries have Mr. Asquith's whole-hearted support. He laid the foundation of a free library in West Ham, the gift of Mr. Passmore Edwards, and after commending that gentleman's generosity in providing seventy-three free libraries, he said: The complaint was made—sometimes with a certain amount of reason—that fiction and light literature formed an excessive proportion of the books borrowed from libraries. He was glad to find that that did not apply in West Ham to anything like the extent to which it did in many towns. It might be true that there was in the literary production of the present day an excessive proportion of the foolish, the trivial, the ephemeral. They would always find among the frequenters of these institutions a considerable proportion of those who came to browse on the lightest possible literary fare, but the broad fact remained that libraries such as that offered not only facilities and opportunities, but inducements and temptations, to self-culture which could not otherwise be provided, and which were of incalculable value, not merely to individuals and not merely to the corporate life of a particular community, but to the capacity and character of the English nation as a whole.

Non

MRS. ASQUITH

## CHAPTER XVIII

### RECREATIONS AND MRS. ASQUITH

TO all men some recreation is necessary, to none more than to a political leader. The arduous duties of ministerial work and parliamentary life make absolutely necessary frequent change of air and scene and frequent diversion of interest, and with few exceptions all our public men spend a portion of their scanty leisure in some open-air exercise. Golf has secured the largest number of devotees, and it is in roaming over the links that Mr. Asquith finds his chief recreation. During the autumn vacation he usually visits one of the golf courses north of the Tweed. On several occasions he has played with Mr. Balfour, and the two statesmen have tested their skill with the clubs in many a friendly game. It would be invidious to state which is the better player and which has won the most encounters, but Mr. Balfour is certainly the more practised and enthusiastic golfer of the two.

Mr. Asquith is not a keen and every-day follower of this popular pastime, but when he takes up the "implements" he generally proves himself fairly competent. His association with the game commenced in 1895, under the tutorship of the veteran coach, Tom Morris. It is recorded that he shaped well for a beginner and that his instructor was highly pleased with the initial performances of his distinguished pupil. He is not a long driver, but rather a steady player, and he shows his greatest skill in the negotiation of bunkers.

Mr. Asquith's wife and his four sons also play golf, and it is rumoured they can give the head of the family a very tough contest. It is therefore re-assuring to hear, when one sees so many reports in the press of the emphatic epithets used by certain eminent legislators when they miss the ball, that Mr. Asquith's exasperations and

disappointments never find an audible outlet in anything more powerful than the mild expression of "dash it all".

Speaking at a golf tournament in his constituency on 23rd August, 1896, Mr. Asquith said that golf was a noble game, but one of the most difficult of human accomplishments. He added that he spoke in no mere rhetorical sense but with great depth of feeling, because, for the past fortnight, on the links of St. Andrews, he had been endeavouring, and for the most part in vain, to cut a decent figure at the game.

Mr. Asquith enjoys good health and has a robust constitution. Addressing a gathering of the medical profession in June, 1901, he said he could not remember having spent two consecutive days in bed for the last twenty-five years. What must have been still more shocking to his audience was his statement that he had not swallowed half a dozen bottles of medicine in his life. He belonged to that class of patients, he said, who, when they went to consult a doctor, were told they should "avoid excitement, lead a regular life, and take an occasional tonic".

Mr. Asquith is interested in horticulture, and in opening a flower show at Tayport in August, 1897, he made an interesting speech. He said the love of flowers both in their wild and cultivated state was as intense and as universal in Great Britain as in any other country in the world. He looked upon Scotland as a nursery and training ground for gardeners. The most superficial observer could not help but notice the diffused interest in floriculture, and one of the most pleasing signs of this was the infinite amount of care and skill expended upon flowers at even the most wayside stations. Many beautiful spots had thus been created. The love of gardening was not confined to the villages, but in the manufacturing towns the unsightliness incidental to the carrying on of industrial operations had been mitigated and often completely disguised by the cultivation of flowers.

What might be said for floriculture and said with truth was that, as a pastime, it was unsurpassed by any other form of recreation. It not only took one into the open air but it answered that which he believed to be the best test

to apply to any form of real recreation, it completely, for the time being, absorbed one's interest and was as exacting in the matter of its demands upon one's attention and concentration, as any of what men called the serious occupations of life.

Mr. Asquith occasionally delights to take part in a little harmless amusement. One day in July, 1894, in company with Mr. Balfour, he set out for some diversion to Earl's Court Exhibition. Mr. Balfour had on a previous occasion experienced the exhilaration of shooting the water chute, and he persuaded Mr. Asquith to accompany him on a second trip. To the huge amusement of both, the drop into the water gave them a good drenching. They next ventured on a run on the switchback railway, and then they tried the "Haunted Swing". The effect of this latter artifice is to delude the occupant into the idea that the compartment in which he is seated is describing an entire circle instead of which it merely moves backwards and forwards in pendulum style. Needless to say, the two statesmen greatly enjoyed their "afternoon's sport".

Mrs. Asquith is almost as well known as her husband. As Miss Margot Tennant, the only daughter of Sir Chas. Tennant, she excelled as one of the chief favourites of London society. Possessed of exuberant vitality and a winsome personality, she was welcomed everywhere. Alike in the hunting field and in the fashionable drawing-room she led the way. Her free open nature and light-hearted simplicity brought her a host of friends and admirers.

A very highly accomplished woman and a brilliant conversationalist, she took a great interest in public and political affairs, and was always glad to avail herself of the privilege of conversing with the many eminent men she came into contact with. Although full of life and high spirits she detested the artificiality of "Society," with its emptiness and vain frivolity. Her free and somewhat impetuous spirit chafed under the conventionalities and restrictions of fashionable life. She loved above all things freedom, reality and truth, and she longed to spend her energies in doing "something," and in helping forward good causes.

Mrs. Asquith's name has often been mentioned in connection with the "Souls". In past days clever women held *salons*, to which famous men and women had free entrance for social and intellectual intercourse with the best talkers of the day. Society is too large to attempt anything of the sort in London now; what is known as the "Souls," however, is the nearest approach to it that has been seen in our generation. There was no society formed, rules made, or names enrolled; it grew from the intimate friendship that so many persons had with Mrs. Asquith and her circle, and it found its nourishment in the keen intellectual enjoyment that cultured and eminent men took in exchanging ideas with a few brilliant women. Nearly all the young men who began their social existence in this coterie, and breathed its atmosphere of unconventional and enthusiastic comradeship, have become famous and occupied high positions either in the cabinets of both political parties, in the Law Courts, or in our Foreign and Colonial administration. If Mrs. Asquith has had a share in influencing the young men of this generation, she owes much herself to the influence of many great men of the last—men like Jowett, Gladstone, Tennyson, Symonds, Bowen, Lawrence, Oliphant and others.

Mr. and Mrs. Asquith were married on May 10th, 1894, at St. George's Church, Hanover Square. The wedding was the social event of the year and aroused great interest. The officiating clergy were the Bishop of Rochester, Canon Scott Holland, and the Rev. David Anderson. The ceremony was witnessed by a distinguished company which included Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, Lord Rosebery, the Earl of Kimberley, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Sir Henry Fowler, Mr. Morley, Mr. Bryce, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Chamberlain, Viscount Peel and the American and Russian Ambassadors. Mr. Haldane acted as best man, and one of the bridesmaids was Miss Dorothy Drew. The bride was attired in rich white satin and carried a prayer book instead of the usual bouquet. The hymn "O God our help in ages past" was sung at Mr. Asquith's request. Mr. Gladstone, Lord Rosebery and Mr. A. J. Balfour amongst others signed the register. The wedding gifts were unusually numerous. The present

King and Queen gave Mrs. Asquith a brooch of diamonds and sapphires. Three of the presents that afforded great gratification to Mr. Asquith were those made respectively by the staff at the Home Office, a group of his old schoolfellows, and his constituents.

The letter that accompanied the present from his old schoolfellows shows the deep personal esteem in which he is held by all who are privileged with his friendship. The letter, it is worth noting, was dated from the Carlton Club, and read as follows: "A few of your old schoolfellows have joined in sending you the accompanying epergne as a proof of our happy reminiscences of your connection with the City of London School, and as a tribute of esteem and admiration for one of the most brilliant and successful of its scholars. Differing, as most of us do, from you in politics, we gladly recognise the manly independence which you have steadily displayed, and the general approval which apart from party politics has followed your public career in popular esteem. Fortunately these minor differences are no bar to our public testimony of your worth; and as schoolfellows and as citizens we wish you and yours long life and prosperity in the new estate."

It can truly be said that Mr. and Mrs. Asquith are kin spirits. Both are religious, and both work out their religion in their daily lives. In English public life few men and women have won the permanent confidence and respect of the nation, and wielded a potent influence over it, who have not been imbued with the spirit of true religion.

Although superficial observers would not suspect it, Mr. Asquith is known among his friends as the kindest and most considerate of men—emotional, affectionate and intensely sympathetic. It is true that he has an iron self control and this deceives many. But hundreds of instances could be given of the marvellous love and confidence his strong reserved nature has inspired. He is the first one to whom those who have the privilege of his friendship go to for sympathy and help in their times of trouble. It would amaze those who write so glibly of personal animosities among the Liberal leaders if they knew the terms of affectionate friendship that exist between Mr. Asquith and those of his colleagues who are continually being

pictured by certain writers as his personal foes and rivals. Justice can only be done to this aspect of Mr. Asquith's character at a later time, and one of the surest means of securing it will be the publication of many of his letters.

Mr. Asquith is a remarkable letter writer, and a wonderful judge of character and ability. He can read anyone he has met and conversed with in an unerring way, but he never disparages or ridicules. He is an excellent conversationalist, and like Mr. Gladstone he is a capital listener. He is never indifferent even when he disagrees, and he notices everything that is said to him by all alike, be they young or old, obscure or famous.

Mrs. Asquith is the most devoted of wives. She has a little daughter of her own named Elizabeth and a son of two years named Anthony of whom she is very fond. She has also proved a real mother to her five step-children and is very proud of the brilliant scholastic successes of her eldest stepson.

Mrs. Asquith is of slight stature with dark hair and a keen intellectual face. She has a striking personality and an unusual charm of manner. She is well read and a clever writer. Her accomplishments are varied. She sings, acts, dances, plays several instruments, and speaks a number of languages. As a hostess Mrs. Asquith is unsurpassed. Sport and country life are perhaps more to her liking than the society life of London. She is a splendid horsewoman, and rides well to hounds.

Mrs. Asquith is a frequent occupant of the ladies' gallery, in the House of Commons. She takes a keen practical interest in her husband's political work, and gives him that quiet wifely sympathy and support which so many eminent statesmen, Mr. Gladstone and Lord Beaconsfield among others, have found so invaluable during their strenuous lives. Mrs. Asquith takes an active part in the work of the Women's Liberal Association, and shares her husband's deep human interest in social reform. In her own spheres, Mrs. Asquith is a political force of no little power, for she has the true qualities of a leader and an abundance of that electric energy which dissipates indifference and overcomes all opposition.

## CHAPTER XIX

### EDUCATION.

FOR many years Mr. Asquith has rendered distinguished service to the cause of education. He has recognised that it is a subject of transcendent importance to this country, and he has repeatedly deplored the grave inefficiency of our present system, and its confusion and incompleteness. He has never missed an opportunity of endeavouring to stimulate the interest of the people in the subject, to impress upon them its vital importance, and to urge them to insist on the establishment of a great educational system, liberally equipped and supported, and giving to the rising generation the best possible training to enable them to maintain and increase the power and prosperity of their country. In his opinion the most urgent need of our country is a fully equipped system of education. By that, he thinks, the nation will stand or fall.

Mr. Asquith's greatest efforts in regard to education have necessarily been largely of a negative character, though they have been full of suggestion and counsel, because he has been compelled by his convictions to concentrate his energies and abilities in opposing to the uttermost the education policy of the last two Unionist administrations. We propose to deal at some length with his activities on this subject. His speeches upon it are instinct with a deep genuine interest in the welfare of the children, they are distinguished by a full and ripe knowledge of all the problems involved, and they throw a luminous light on the great controversy that has occupied

and still occupies the mind of the country. They will well repay careful reading, for they are in the highest degree eloquent, lucid, interesting and instructive.

Some speeches on the education question made by prominent members of the Unionist party, immediately after it came into power, caused much misgiving in Liberal circles. In a speech in January, 1896, to the National Education League, Mr. Asquith commented on the Ministerial declarations and said that the attitude of the League was one of defence not of aggression. They were perfectly content to abide by the settlement of 1870. Their policy in relation to national education was not a stationary one. They desired to work upon the basis of the compromise of 1870, which had wrought a revolution as beneficial as any recorded in the history of social reform. Mr. Asquith went on to pay a tribute to the work of the voluntary schools. "At the outset let me say that I entirely disclaim any spirit of hostility to the work of the voluntary schools. They include, after all, the majority of the elementary schools of the country and they have in attendance within their walls a majority of the children. They have been erected and maintained at a very considerable expense of money and by a large devotion of time and zeal, for which no tribute of gratitude and of praise could be too high. The educational work that has been done and that is being done to-day by our voluntary schools is work which it is almost impossible for us as a nation to dispense with. I will say further, this is not in our view in the least degree a sectarian question. It is not a question between Church and Chapel; it is not a question between the Established Church on the one side and of Nonconformists on the other."

Mr. Asquith proceeded to say that Nonconformists were satisfied with the religious teaching given in the Board Schools because it was unsectarian and could be supplemented by work in the Sunday Schools and in the home. He then turned to examine Mr. Balfour's classical phrase "the intolerable strain on the voluntary schools". He pointed out that their annual income was £4,750,000

and that £3,660,000 of this came from the public purse. After twenty-five years of intolerable strain the cost of educating each child had risen from 25s. to 38s., while the average annual private subscription per child had decreased from 7s. to 6s. 6d.

"They say, and truly say, that they have not the rates to fall back upon. Why have they not? Because they do not comply with two conditions which Parliament has ventured to think in its wisdom are essential to receipt of support from the rates—namely, in the first place, the school shall be in the truest sense a public school for the benefit not of this or that sect but of the whole locality and therefore a school in which no denominational formulas are taught; in the second place, because Parliament has required as a condition of receiving support from the rates that the elected representatives of those who pay the rates should have control."

On 5th May, 1896, Sir John Gorst moved the second reading of a bill to give further aid to voluntary schools. Mr. Asquith in a comprehensive speech of great ability moved its rejection. He said that while the bill contained some valuable provisions they were linked with other proposals, the outcome being a scheme which would have the effect of revolutionising the foundations, dislocating the machinery, impoverishing the results, and embittering the spirit of our whole system of education. Educational patchwork and administrative chaos were presented under the specious name of decentralisation. He had no hesitation in saying that the constant raising of the minimum standard of educational efficiency for many years past was due to the impartiality and unsleeping ubiquitous activity of the Education Department. Under the provisions of the bill the small and inefficient School Boards in rural districts would not be removed while the efficient School Boards would be mutilated and hampered in their action. He believed it would have been impossible for statesmanship to have devised a scheme more calculated to engender friction and confusion. During the last quarter of a century there

had been in this country two great propelling educational forces, and this bill proposed to paralyse the one and cripple the other.

Mr. Asquith proceeded to examine the financial clauses of the bill. He objected to the expenditure on education being permanently limited at a time when vast sums of money were being spent on the army and navy. If more money was to be spent on education there were certain conditions which should be complied with. First that the money should be impartially distributed between voluntary schools and board schools; the second that the money should be spent on the improvement of education, and that a local contribution in some form should be an essential condition of every grant; the third was that schools should introduce into their management some public representative element. These three conditions he maintained were not fulfilled by the bill. Turning to clause twenty-seven, which dealt with the religious question, he declared that the agitation in favour of the measure was a clerical agitation. If this clause were passed the children attending large schools would be herded into separate theological pens branded with the names of their particular sects and taught under conditions which would compel them to attach the main importance not to those truths which united but to those doctrines which divided them. He knew his amendment would be rejected but he declared that this was merely a preliminary stage in what was destined to be a stubborn and protracted contest.

The bill was withdrawn on 22nd June, much to the annoyance of its supporters. Mr. Balfour advanced the lame excuse of the shortness of time at the Government's disposal, but the defeat of the measure was due to the determined and unflagging opposition of the Liberal party.

The next step of the Government in education reform was a proposal to make an aid grant of five shillings per scholar to the voluntary schools. This amazing project was immediately protested against by the Opposition. Mr. Asquith in a brief but incisive speech pointed out that the

necessitous voluntary schools would receive not five shillings but six shillings, seven shillings or even ten shillings a child if the grant was to be computed upon the whole of the scholars attending all voluntary schools. He asked if the grant would be given also to necessitous board schools. Mr. Balfour immediately rose and replied that Mr. Asquith's question was premature. His request would require different machinery. He could not deny, however, that the board schools had an equal right for increased aid.

The resolution was further discussed on 4th February, and Mr. Asquith who led the Opposition asked the House to reject the resolution. He re-affirmed the opinion that if public money was to be devoted to such a purpose it should be equally distributed among all the necessitous claimants. He said the phrase "statutory equality" had now become a laughing-stock on the Treasury bench. As on the occasion of last year's bill, the Opposition were willing to grant whatever sum was required if an adequate security was given that it would be spent entirely and exclusively on the improvement of our educational system. The government should have dealt with the necessitous board schools as well as the necessitous voluntary schools. He supposed the rise of the grant from four shillings to five shillings was some form of solatium for the postponed fulfilment of the voluntary schools' long deferred hopes. It would have been more frank of the Government if they had admitted that they required £616,000 for the denominational schools of the country. Parliament was asked to assent to this grant without any security that the money would be well spent, and not frittered away in favouritism and jobbery. The resolution introduced a spirit of invidious discrimination entirely opposed to the statutory equality which had hitherto prevailed.

On the first of the following month, Mr. Asquith addressed a great meeting at Bradford, which was organised in opposition to the Voluntary Schools Bill. Passing to the main subject of the evening, he said the Government had closured the debate in the Commons, and he felt it was his bounden duty to meet the electors, who were the final

and supreme judges on matters of this kind. He pointed out the flagrant injustice to which Parliament had been asked to make itself a party. As Liberals they did not desire that education should be at a standstill. They were certainly not averse from allotting more money for education, but they required that it should be of an unsectarian character. They were willing to stand by the compromise of 1870, but they would not consent to public money being voted without public control.

When the bill reached the committee stage Mr. Asquith again opposed it. He said it would have the effect of relieving the subscribers to voluntary schools. Parliament should have absolute control over the expenditure it voted. He moved an amendment to this effect but it was defeated. He also protested against the manner in which the bill was being forced through the House without adequate discussion.

On the third reading of the bill he moved its rejection in an earnest and vigorous speech. He summed up the objections against the bill which he said was destined to be a landmark in the history of the House of Commons. Concluding he said: "I say this bill starts from an invidious and unfounded discrimination between the needs and claims of the different classes of schools. It lets loose large sums of money to be scrambled for by clerical managers, without any regulating principle, and without any effective security, either for local or for Parliamentary control. It provides no safeguards for the appropriation of the doles to the improvement of education, for bettering the *status* of the teachers, or for redressing or even mitigating the injustice suffered by the Nonconformist parents. It has been initiated and conducted through this House by methods and in a spirit wholly alien to our hitherto unvaried practice. For these reasons it is an unjust and unconstitutional measure. It will go forth to the people of this country, not as a settlement but as a provocation."

The bill was carried by a majority of 200; the Irish Nationalists voting with the Government.

The *Westminster Gazette* remarked that Mr. Asquith's speech was the event of the evening. "It will always be remembered as one of the most eloquent and scathing indictments of the principles of the bill and the methods to which the Government have had to resort in forcing the measure through Parliament." Mr. Gould in his cartoon represented Mr. Asquith as a dog having "a last nip" at the measure before it entered the House of Lords.

Mr. Asquith continued his great services to education by opposing step by step at every stage the second education bill of the Government (1902) which unfortunately was passed into law. He was present at nearly every discussion of the measure in the House of Commons, and by his masterly speeches and unflagging industry he inspired the Liberal party to an obstinate and prolonged resistance to the measure. The result was that its grave evils and scandalous injustices were effectually exposed, and the country was roused from end to end. From every quarter there was voiced the predominant feeling of the nation that the bill was a menace to educational progress and contravened the great principles of democratic government. Throughout the debates on the bill, Mr. Asquith showed an intimate knowledge of every branch and detail of the subject, and Ministers were again and again confounded by the unerring skill with which he discerned not only the surface evils but also those pernicious, far-reaching effects of its provisions which were so cleverly disguised in the wording of its clauses.

The *British Weekly*, by far the ablest and most influential of religious journals, to which belongs the great honour of having done more—apart from its being the inspiration of the passive resistance movement, which will eventually kill the Act and is meanwhile keeping alive the intense indignation of the country against it—than any other power to enlighten the people as to the sinister purposes of the Act and its blighting influences not only on the educational but also on the truly religious life of the nation, greatly appreciated Mr. Asquith's powerful

support. "We note with special satisfaction," it wrote, "the excellent speeches which Mr. Asquith is delivering in the country on the Education Bill. No politician has better grasped its evil intent, and has exposed it more convincingly. No one has more frankly accepted it as the first charge and business of the Liberal party to undo its iniquitous provisions. More of such speaking as Mr. Asquith's would enormously reinforce and revive the Liberal party."

It would occupy too much space to notice even briefly the large number of speeches Mr. Asquith has delivered on the Act of 1902, but the question is one of such transcendent importance that we make no apology for giving a fairly adequate representation of his views.

On the second reading of the bill, which was carried on 8th May, 1902, Mr. Asquith delivered a very able speech. In the course of his remarks he said: "I think there is nothing more remarkable in this debate than the testimony of the growing consciousness of men of all creeds and schools that the most formidable danger which now menaces not only our industrial supremacy, but our very national existence, is the relative ignorance of our people. For my part, I say frankly that if I persuade myself that this or any other measure proceeding from any quarter was adapted to remove or diminish that peril, I should be prepared to close my eyes to a great many other things to which I might take exception. I regret more than words can express that the Government, in the ostensible pursuit of what I agree to be a high educational ideal, namely, the creation of a single authority, have proposed a plan in this bill which will impair the usefulness of the present authority for the purposes of secondary education, and at the same time will annihilate the existence of the present authority, who are doing the best work in the country for education. In large towns it is not disputed that the School Boards are doing admirable educational work. The only charge which the Vice-President can bring against them is that the schools are too big, and that, therefore, the education is deficient. Are you going to remedy that by a

duplication of these schools made by the ratepayers and at the same time impose upon them the obligation of paying the whole of the expenses of the denominational schools? It is quite true that the Government have shrunk from an immediate and general massacre of the schools. The School Boards are to live, but under what conditions? With a noose around their neck which a casual majority of the Town Council, elected possibly on an entirely different issue, might use with fatal consequences. For the first time in our municipal history you will be introducing into the elections for the County Councils and Town Councils the question of the maintenance or the non-maintenance of the School Boards, associated as it will be by a cluster of religious and sectarian tests from which our municipal contests have, happily, up to the present, been removed. It would have been far better to have delayed the creation of this one authority and to have preserved the existence of the large and efficient School Boards, and facilitate, as you might very well do, a sufficiently elastic provision in the bill establishing a concordat between the School Boards on the one side and the Town Councils and County Councils on the other, by which they could jointly undertake a regular and co-ordinate system of elementary education." Continuing, Mr. Asquith said : " The rate is the only new source of revenue which the bill provides. Is it going to be a popular rate? In the case of the worst schools, schools in poor districts, where the teacher is ill-paid, and the apparatus out of date, do you think you are going to extract from the ratepayers a sum sufficient to bring that school up to the level of the School Board system. That is the crux of the whole question. It is an anomaly for private persons to manage public funds. I agree that the anomaly was essential ever since the Education Act was passed, because we have always drawn a broad line of distinction between the administration of funds which come from the public exchequer and the administration of funds which are derived from local rates. In this case the Government have resolved to resort to the rates, and they cannot produce a single instance where, in the case of

funds derived from the rates, the ratepayers have not had control of the funds. I ask hon. gentlemen opposite and the two Houses of Convocation, Why do they object to representative authority having the control? In a vast number of parishes—8,000 or 9,000—you will have schools financed in that way to which parents will be compelled to send their children because there is no alternative or choice. Those schools at present belong to one religious denomination, and to one only, and that is a state of things which this bill proposes to continue. All the bill does, having provided that these schools shall have a large reservoir of resource, is to give a permissive power to the local authority to appoint a number not exceeding one-third of the managers of the school. The voice of the ratepayers, who contribute nine-tenths, and in many cases ninety-nine hundredths of the cost of the schools, is to make itself felt though the obstructive action of an articulate and noisy minority. It is idle to say that the managers are subject to the control of the Committee—that the Committee being appointed by the County Council, itself an elected body, provides a sufficient measure of public control. The framers of this bill burn to a fetish academic incense on the altar of popular control, and leave the actual management of the schools to those who have no public responsibility whatever. That from the Liberal point of view is a fatal vice in this bill; and I ask the House to reject it because, in my judgment, it offers no real prospect of educational improvement, it aggravates and extends the area of sectarian animosity, and it sets at defiance one of the most fundamental principles of democratic government."

Mr. Asquith, in one of his many practical speeches exposing in detail the glaring injustices of the bill, said it was a great fallacy to say that the value of structures and equipments of voluntary schools had been wholly contributed by the Church. A very considerable sum had been contributed by the State in the way of building grants. The 1870 Act provided that these schools should receive from Government a sum equal to that contributed voluntarily. Now these schools were

unequipped and undermanned, and the education given was inefficient; and in their proposals to remedy this, the Government provided that the whole cost would be borne by the taxpayer. The cost of educating each child in these schools was fifty-five shillings, and the amount contributed voluntarily was five shillings per head, crediting every possible halfpenny to voluntary supporters.

And who was going to manage the schools? The managers were to be six, of which two would represent the public and four the private subscribers. The State contributed £11 out of £12, and had two representatives out of six. In arithmetical terms, as eleven is to one, so is two to four in Anglicans' reckoning. When the state contributed eleven-twelfths of the cost, it ought to be the predominant force in the management of the schools.

Speaking at a great protest meeting held in London on 10th June, 1902, and presided over by Lord Rosebery, he drew attention to the position the bill would create in regard to village schools. He said: "In these villages—I am speaking now of a very large part of England—there is only one school. That is a school to which the children are compelled by law to go. If the parents do not send them there they can be fined and imprisoned. That school is highly subsidised. Practically the whole cost of its maintenance, or nearly the whole, is paid out of the public exchequer. And yet that school is almost, as regards every one of its daily concerns, managed and directed entirely by private and irresponsible persons. Let me ask you to realise what it means. It means that as regards the provision of this, the most urgent of our social needs, you have in these schools no representative authority. You have no Cowper-Temple clause. The schools, in fact, are what we were told the other day in the House of Commons under an ideal system they ought to be—vestibules of the Church. The teacher, too, often finds himself engaged in the performance of a strangely intermixed variety of secular and of religious functions, and what is the educational result? For the last seven years, at any rate, the State has been piling subsidy upon subsidy in the interest of these schools. It

gave them 5s. a head in 1897; it abolished the 17s. 6d. limit, and by the device of the block grant it has removed one of the great pecuniary penalties of inefficiency from which those schools suffered more than any other. And yet, notwithstanding that they have been the recipients of that succession of exceptional bounties and favours from the State, by their own confession these schools are to a large extent bankrupt in money, bad in their educational appliances, imperfect in the qualifications of the teachers to give instruction, a retrograde and an unproductive factor in our educational system, for which the taxpayers pay, and from which the children on whom the future of England depends are obliged to suffer."

Mr. Asquith was one of the chief speakers at the monster meeting held specially to protest against the bill at the Alexandra Palace, London, on 2nd November, 1902, which was memorable for the appearance on the same platform, after some months of slight estrangement, of himself and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Their common indignation at this infamous bill had obliterated the memories of their unfortunate divisions over the South African War.

Mr. Asquith in his speech said he would take the meeting at once to that which, in his view, was the heart and centre of the whole matter. What was the greatest bane and curse of our national life? Ignorance. What was the first and most urgent need of all our national needs? Education. If Great Britain were to hold her own in the struggle for existence; if we were to show ourselves worthy of, and equal to, the task which Providence seemed to have assigned to us; if, more than all, we were to be a free people in any real and significant sense, we must become an instructed people. How were we to become an instructed people? Only in one way, and that was by establishing and developing a truly national system of education. But this was precisely what the Education Bill did not do. It set up side by side two classes of schools, each deriving its resources from public funds. On the one hand we would in the future have a set of schools under popular management, from

which there was complete exclusion of sectarian badges and labels, where—and this was most important of all—choice of the teachers was in the hands of a responsible body, a body which had no motive or interest in the world to adopt any other method of selection than efficiency and merit. On the other hand, we should have another set of schools carried on in buildings some of which were private property, but the great majority of which were held upon trust for educational purposes, and could not without a breach of that trust be applied to any other than educational purposes. Schools would be carried on in these buildings in which the primary object was at all hazards to safeguard the sectarian atmosphere, and where, with the exception of a limited and to a large extent useless power of veto, the local authority would have no voice in the appointment of teachers, who, although paid out of the public funds, were to be selected by an irresponsible body controlled by a denominational majority. What would be the state of the teaching profession under this condition of things, in this great public State-remunerated service, in a large majority of the elementary schools of the country? The highest grade of all which contained the prizes of the profession would be shut to everybody but the Anglican teachers. In the next grade the only chance for the Nonconformists was to obtain an appointment by the grace and goodwill of the denominational managers of the time. In the lowest grade of all, the threshold of the profession, what would be the position of the clever, capable, talented Nonconformist child who was qualified in every way for the profession, and who became, by the appointment of the local authority, a pupil teacher? He got his foot upon the first rung of the ladder with the knowledge that the highest steps were permanently closed against him for life. There was one way in which he might climb to the top—and that was by forsaking the faith in which he was bred. A few years ago there was not a man in this country, Churchman or Nonconformist, who in his wildest dreams imagined that the twentieth century was going to be opened by the reimposition of denominational tests in the public

service of this country. From an educational point of view, what would be the result? In the majority of our public schools there would be no such open career for talent and capacity as was essential. There would be no security that we should get the best men, or that we should get the best teaching. Everywhere we should find education crippled and impoverished.

In a speech to a great mass meeting at Pontypool he comprehensively reviewed the bill. Nothing in the bill had stirred Mr. Asquith more than its grossly unfair provisions regarding religious education and the appointment of teachers, and on this occasion the most earnest part of his address was devoted to these subjects. Looking at the bill, he said, from the standpoint of an educational measure, what was the object in pursuit of which the country ought not to stint the expenditure of money? It was that of getting the best teaching for the children. The teaching profession would in future be a State service, and its members ought to be chosen by public responsible authorities, but the appointments were now to be given into the hands of a body upon which the public were represented by two members and private persons were represented by four. What was the purpose, the object, and the justification of this iniquitous arrangement? It was avowedly in order that the teachers might be selected from the religious denomination with which the school was connected, and what was the result? It was two-fold. In the first place they would have inferior teaching, also they would be setting up a denominational doorway so narrow that it would exclude from the teaching community those who were too conscientious to abjure the faith in which they had been brought up. Were they going to submit to this new revolution? The object was to surround even the secular instruction with a sectarian atmosphere. It was a system which in his judgment was administratively unworkable, educationally inefficient, and politically unjust. It might be forced upon the country by the votes of a transient majority at Westminster, but it would not, it could not, be, and it ought not to be accepted by the nation. Its

enactment as law so far from being a solution and a settlement, would, he ventured to predict—and he never made a prophecy in politics with greater confidence—be the starting-point for a new campaign in which the forces of progress, with set purpose and with united ranks, would march to a certain and a not distant victory.

The third reading of the bill was carried on 3rd December, 1902, by a majority of 123 votes. Liberals of all shades and Nonconformists especially will not readily forget the part played by the Irish Nationalists in assisting the passing of this bill into law. Without their help the Government on more than one occasion, but on one occasion of the first importance, would have been defeated, and the bill would probably never have become law. That fact must be remembered.

Mr. Asquith made a singularly powerful and closely reasoned speech during the debate on the third reading. The *Daily News* parliamentary comment referred to it as follows: "Then came Mr. Asquith, who spoke with the weight, emphasis, power of marshalling argument, in which, perhaps, he excels all the members of the House. His points were not new; but they were extremely well put, especially the statement that the gravity of the blow to denominationalism was to be measured by the bill's denial of justice to the people at large. The bill did away with Mr. Forster's 'equivalent contribution,' it established the most glaring contrast between contribution on the one hand and control on the other. He spoke finally, and with more than his accustomed feeling, of the great weight of inequality that the bill carried with it, the inequality that will destroy it. His fine speech was very gratifying to his party."

A fortnight later Mr. Asquith, in addressing a great meeting at Ipswich, stated the position of the Liberal party regarding the finality of the Education Act just passed. He had already pointed out in several speeches that the Government neither asked for nor received any mandate at the last general election to deal with the subject of education, and that they had specifically invited

the opinion of the country on one single issue. He cited the clearest and most definite declarations of Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain to this effect. To quote one only: At Coventry Mr. Chamberlain said, "This is no ordinary election. It is an election not to decide social and domestic issues such as are generally before an electorate, but an election held at a period when we have to deal with great national and imperial questions."

Mr. Asquith now declared: "The State, and the State alone can properly devise and organise a system which shall bring within the reach of every child and every household in the country such a system of training as will, at the least, turn them out honest and efficient craftsmen, and if they have the faculty to fill a wider range, give them opportunity to mount step by step up the ladder of intellectual promotion till they place at their own disposal and that of the community to which they belong every faculty with which Nature has endowed them. It is not a matter that can be settled for us by ecclesiastics. It is to be settled by men as citizens. . . . You can have no settlement of this question until these two things go. In every school supported and maintained out of the rates and taxes of this country there must be upon the board of management a representative and responsible majority, and in every such school access to the highest place must not be denied to any one. If those two things were settled, as they must be and will be, I say, speaking for myself, I shall be prepared to give the most liberal terms to the representatives of the Church as regards their interest in the fabric of the building. As regards the so-called religious difficulty, that question ought to be settled, not by ecclesiastics, but by the parents. When once you have cleared out of the way these two matters which I have referred to, there is no reason why, with a policy of give and take, the whole of the religious difficulty should not be banished into the limbo of the past."

Mr. Asquith was again to the fore in leading the opposition to the extension of the Act to London, which was proposed and carried in the following year. At a

crowded meeting in North London he voiced the feeling of the metropolis in a passionate condemnation of the Act.

An hour previously, he said, he took part in a division in which the Government obtained a majority of forty only. The Liberals had in the lobby with them what he ventured to describe as the intellectual flower of the Unionist party. The Government only escaped defeat by the aid of the Irish members, members of a party who, a year ago, were being denounced from the Ministerial benches as traitors and rebels. He was not using the language of a partisan, but of every educational expert in the country, when he said that the London School Board had during the past thirty years done more to raise the level of elementary education than any other agency. It might be that in some parts of the country the school board system was unsuited to local requirements, but when they came to the great urban communities, and to a community so unique as that of London, it could be shown that the educational requirements were such as to necessitate a special body of carefully selected men and women who could devote their energies to the discharge of educational work. . . . The system of maintaining exclusively out of public funds institutions which would not be subject to effective popular control was a fundamental violation of the first principles of democratic government. He regarded those provisions of the Act of 1902 which were now being applied to London as the most reactionary proposals that had been made by any Government of this country within living memory. It was a disgrace to Parliament that we should in the twentieth century establish denominational tests in a great branch of the public service; it was, too, an outrage upon all our political traditions. When they once realised the extent and the magnitude of the issue, he did not doubt that even though by the accident of Parliamentary fortune this bill might possibly succeed in finding a place on the statute book, it would remain there not as a settlement of a great question but as a perpetual provocation and challenge to the Liberal opinion of London until they succeeded in blotting it out of the statute book.

## CHAPTER XX

### FREE TRADE

IN the fierce controversy that has raged and is still raging around our fiscal policy, Mr. Asquith has been one of the most prominent figures. The controversy is one exactly suited to his political genius, which shows itself to greater advantage in a case where hard fact rather than loose sentiment is involved, and where the appeal has to be made to the intellect rather than to the emotions. There are politicians who are for ever unctuously expressing their imperial sentiments, and who talk so much of themselves and their connection with the Empire, that they eventually become possessed with the idea that they and they alone are inspired with the imperial spirit. During the discussion on Free Trade, it has been a common error on the part of some politicians to mistake wild thinking for imagination and emotional rhetoric for deep feeling. Mr. Asquith was eminently fitted in every way to expose the dangerous exhortations that inevitably flowed from this confusion of ideas.

It is a great mistake to think of Mr. Asquith exclusively as simply a keen debater and cold reasoner. He has in an exceptional degree the gift of imagination, and he has ever been an idealist in the truest sense of the word. No one can read his speeches, whether on imperial, foreign or domestic policy, without being inspired to wide and noble conceptions of the subject dealt with. Especially has this been so with his great deliverances in the cause of Free Trade. In the discussion of a supreme question such as this, sound reason and cold logic, though essential, are

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not enough. They must be re-inforced by imaginative insight, and this is why we say this controversy is exactly suited to Mr. Asquith's political genius. Mr. Asquith has imagination and sympathy, and it is this combination added to a mind without platitude and free from delusion which gives him the rarest of all gifts—judgment. No one would deny that Mr. Asquith had judgment of the highest kind, and he was therefore eminently fitted for the great work, the burden of which fell upon him, of repelling the attack inaugurated by Mr. Chamberlain.

It is admitted by all parties that he has performed his task in the most thorough and complete fashion, and it can be said without exaggeration that the favourable position of the Free Trade forces to-day is largely owing to his untiring energy in its defence, and to the innumerable "clinching, convincing speeches," as Lord Rosebery has termed them, which he has delivered in reply to the "raging, tearing propaganda" of Mr. Chamberlain. In fact, as one commentator has stated, the "great fight" very largely developed into an intellectual duel between these two distinguished men. Every speech made by Mr. Chamberlain was followed in a short space of time by one from Mr. Asquith, and to the rousing, exciting jingoistic sentiments, prepared "illustrations," and remarkable energy and fire of the Protectionist chief, were opposed, and as it has proved, were successfully opposed, the flawless logic and cogent reasoning, the hard indisputable facts and figures derived from unquestionable sources, and the unwearying industry and vigour of the great protagonist of Free Trade.

These features have distinguished the two campaigns. On the one side there has been a fervid enthusiasm engineered and ministered to by all the devices of which the "Tariff Reform League," that importing corporation of Yankee electioneering methods, has been capable: appeals of all kinds to the anti-foreign sentiment—glaring posters of huge fat Germans and diminutive emaciated Englishmen, of triumphant Yankees and downtrodden bankrupt Britons, with all their industries gone

or going, and receiving enormous quantities of foreign goods, paid for by no one knows who. And at the head of this undignified movement, with its disgraceful and unmerited disparagement of our people and our Empire, has been the most conspicuous statesman of the day, with all the accumulated prestige attaching to a popular period of office, to a great popular war, and to a recent colonial tour approved by all parties, exerting to the uttermost his unrivalled powers as a popular orator for the purpose of inflaming the passions and prejudices of the masses in favour of his policy of Preference and Protection, at the same time recklessly promising the workers as the reward of their support higher wages, constant employment, and old-age pensions.

And on the other side there has been the splendidly organised, business-like defence of Free Trade principles. The appeal has been made to the intelligence and to the true imperial spirit of the race, and the test of Free Trade has been gladly accepted as that of the condition of the people and the welfare of the Empire. This great defensive movement has been led by many men of great ability, chief among whom, however, by common consent has stood Mr. Asquith, who has stated with decisive effect the sound practical common-sense principles on which our Free Trade policy is based.

A survey of the great duel between Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Asquith may be of interest. On 15th May, 1903, Mr. Chamberlain launched his thunderbolt at Birmingham and opened the prosecution for Protection, and six days later, on 21st May, Mr. Asquith appeared at Doncaster and opened the defence for Free Trade. It was very appropriate that Mr. Asquith should be the first Free Trade chief to appear at a political meeting to denounce the new fiscal proposals.

A feeling of uncertainty, largely contributed to by a vague cryptic utterance of Lord Rosebery's made two days later at a non-political gathering, had followed Mr. Chamberlain's speech, with its alluring scheme of a self-contained Empire. A certain numbness and dumbness

fell on the Liberal party, while the Protectionist agitation burst out with astonishing force and suddenness, unnerving some of the weaker spirits. Mr. Asquith's straightforward declarations at Doncaster, however, quickly set the new proposals in their right perspective. In a speech of the most decisive phrasing he completely exposed the hollow fallacies and false foundations of Mr. Chamberlain's new scheme, and announced that it would receive the uncompromising and determined opposition of an absolutely united Liberal party.

On 22nd May, the day after Mr. Asquith's speech, Mr. Chamberlain astonished the House of Commons by intimating, during a debate on old-age pensions, in which he was pointedly taunted by the Opposition with the non-fulfilment of his promises on this subject, that he hoped his projected reform of our fiscal system would produce the funds necessary to finance a scheme of old-age pensions.

This announcement convinced the country that Mr. Chamberlain was in earnest regarding his new policy. It was therefore brought forward for discussion in the House of Commons on 28th May, on the motion for the adjournment over Whitsuntide. A very important debate took place, Mr. Chamberlain making a comprehensive exposition of his scheme, and fairly launching himself on his hazardous adventure by the famous declaration: "If you are to give a preference to the Colonies, you must put a tax on food". This speech set the political world seething with excitement and speculation, for it was known that leading members of the Government were directly at variance with Mr. Chamberlain's views. Fiscal reform immediately became the dominating topic of the hour, and the reassembling of Parliament on 8th June was looked forward to with the greatest interest. On the day after its meeting, Parliament found its opportunity, and despite the ruling of the Speaker, commenced a two days' criticism of Mr. Chamberlain's policy.

Mr. Asquith intervened in the discussion on the second day, and made the ablest and most forcible speech that the debate produced. "H.W.M." in the *Daily News* described

it as "as withering a little discourse as it has ever been my privilege to hear. In its way it was as successful a piece of work as his famous cross-examination of Mr. Macdonald of *The Times*. With Mr. Ritchie, the Free Trade Chancellor, Mr. Balfour, the Premier of unsettled convictions, and Mr. Chamberlain, the renegade Free Trader and arch Protectionist, in a row before him, he commented in the freest and plainest language on what he justly and sharply termed the most grotesque and indecent situation presented within the memory of living statesmen. With biting sarcasm he asked why Mr. Chamberlain remained in the Cabinet with Mr. Ritchie. Was he a convert? A brand plucked from the burning, a backslider brought home to the true fold by the gentle persuasion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? If so, he said, 'I congratulate Mr. Ritchie on an unexpected success in the arduous field of missionary effort'."

The one definite outcome of the debate was the announcement that the Government had decided to institute an inquiry into British trade, but this was everywhere recognised as merely a device for keeping the Cabinet temporarily from disruption. Mr. Chamberlain, however, was not to be restrained. The Tariff Reform League immediately entered upon its vigorous agitation, which was replied to by an equally vigorous campaign conducted by the Cobden Club and the Free Trade Union. Mr. Chamberlain during the next few months amplified his proposals in numerous letters to correspondents, and these drew forth explicit declarations of dissent from some of his chief colleegues.

In Parliament, Mr. Balfour successfully prevented further discussion on the specious plea of the "inquiry" that was being held. The controversy, however, continued to grow in interest and importance, and it reached its climax in the publication on 16th September, of Mr. Balfour's pamphlet, entitled *Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade*, and the ministerial resignations of Mr. Chamberlain, Lord George Hamilton, and Mr. Ritchie, which were announced in the newspapers on the 17th. A decidedly

unpleasant, and apparently, to Mr. Balfour personally, a very discreditable, situation, which has not even yet been satisfactorily explained, was revealed in the correspondence that was published concerning these sensational events.

The next important development of the fiscal drama was the Prime Minister's ambiguous "Retaliation and Negotiation" policy speech on 1st October, at Sheffield, which was followed by the Duke of Devonshire's retirement from the Ministry. This unexpected blow was received with dismay by the Unionist party, and drew from Mr. Balfour one of the most peevish and ill-tempered letters that have ever appeared in the press of Great Britain from the pen of a public man.

On 6th October, Mr. Chamberlain, as a free lance liberated from all the restraints and responsibilities of office, opened his "raging, tearing propaganda," and there commenced the great fiscal fight, which is yet going on with almost unabated vigour, and which is still the supreme political question of the day. Mr. Chamberlain selected Glasgow as the starting-point of his campaign. On the following day he spoke at Greenock, and in quick succession he visited Newcastle, Tynemouth, Liverpool and other great centres, speaking to his own constituents at Birmingham on 4th November. As we have mentioned, he was closely followed by Mr. Asquith, who always spoke within a few days of his great opponent, and made on the whole an even larger number of speeches.

Mr. Asquith had, however, already made several great speeches on the issues raised by Mr. Chamberlain. At a great emergency meeting of the National Liberal Federation, held on 1st July, he gave a straight lead to the Liberal party as to the best means of opposing Mr. Chamberlain's policy. The *Daily News* hailed it as "a model of the method that should be adopted by the Free Trade party in dealing with Mr. Chamberlain and the 'inquiring' Government".

He also addressed an immense meeting in St. James's Hall, London, on 30th July, which culminated a very vigorous Liberal campaign in the Metropolis against the

Protectionist policy. On this occasion, Mr. Asquith concentrated his attention on the food-tax proposals, taking as his texts the two declarations of Mr. Chamberlain: "The system of preferential tariffs is the only system by which the Empire can be kept together," and, "it will be impossible to secure preferential tariffs with the Colonies without some duty on corn as well as on some other articles of food".

Two days after Mr. Chamberlain's appearance at Glasgow, Mr. Asquith made his reply at a great meeting of miners and ironworkers held at Cinderford in the Forest of Dean. He put the case for Free Trade in its most convincing and statesmanlike form, and a more crushing reply has perhaps never been made by one statesman to another. He utterly demolished Mr. Chamberlain's assertions. There was no theatrical movements and sensational appeals, it was simply a most masterly exhibition of close reasoning, and a perfect vindication of our Free Trade system.

This speech is included with three others in a small booklet published by Messrs. Methuen and entitled "*Trade and the Empire*". Any one who desires to gain an accurate and comprehensive insight into the fiscal controversy cannot do better than read these speeches of Mr. Asquith's. In a prefatory note to the reprint of the speeches, Mr. Asquith writes as follows: "I have been requested to publish these speeches in a collected form. I do so the more readily because, whatever judgment may be passed upon their controversial value, they do not, so far as I am aware, contain any statement of fact, whether statistical or historical, which has been successfully impugned. Those of us who are engaged in the defence of Free Trade are constantly told that our whole stock-in-trade consists in the mechanical iteration of catchwords, in blind appeals to authority, in ignorant indifference to actual and potential economic forces, and in obsolete conceptions of the Empire. My object in the utterances which are here gathered together has been to vindicate our fiscal system, not as an academic dogma, but as a concrete and living policy. As

a first, though only as a first, step in that process of justification, it is necessary to expose without delay the blunders of fact and of logic which have, so far, accompanied every stage in the new Protectionist campaign." The sting of this note for the Protectionists lies in the fact that about the same date a similar publication of Mr. Chamberlain's speeches was made, with the express announcement that they had been "revised" by their author.

Mr. Asquith, in the four speeches referred to, deals in detail very faithfully with Mr. Chamberlain's assertions, but we propose quoting here only a few of the more striking passages in his replies. Mr. Chamberlain naïvely remarked at Newcastle: "No one denies my facts; all they can do is to quarrel over my figures". Mr. Asquith commenting on this said he was quite unable to see how Mr. Chamberlain's so-called facts could stand if the figures on which they were based were proved wrong. It has been on the concrete cases of figures mentioned by Mr. Chamberlain that Mr. Asquith has joined issue with him most effectively.

One of the first and severest of Mr. Asquith's criticisms of Mr. Chamberlain's statements was directed against his selection of the year 1872 as a basis for general comparison, by means of which he found it possible to draw wholly unfounded conclusions. Mr. Asquith pointed out that if Mr. Chamberlain "had taken the year 1870, two years before, or 1876, four years after, instead of finding a growth of only 20 to 30 millions in our exports, he would have found a growth of over 80 millions; and what is still more striking, if he had taken the exports of 1900 at the prices of 1872, he would have found that they amounted to 425 millions, or an increase of 170 millions, instead of his 30 millions." In a later speech, criticising Mr. Chamberlain's jeremiad on our "stagnant exports," Mr. Asquith put the matter in a very striking form. Having referred to Sir R. Giffen as one of the most distinguished of living statisticians, and as being an admittedly impartial expert, he continued: "Sir Robert Giffen points out that in order to show correctly the net export of the produce of

British labour and capital in goods, we must deduct from the gross total of our exported merchandise the value of the imported raw materials contained in them. That, I think, is perfectly clear. Having made this preliminary assumption he applies the method to two years. He first takes the year 1877, twenty-five years ago, and he then takes the year 1902 ; and how do the figures of our export merchandise work out after that deduction has been made? In 1877 the net produce that British labour and capital exported—so ascertained—was valued at 140 millions. In 1902 that net produce was valued at 224 millions. In other words, during those twenty-five years of this stagnant export trade of ours there has been a net annual growth of 84 millions sterling."

Regarding the favourite bugbear raised by the Protectionists of our imports of manufactured goods, which Mr. Chamberlain had asserted had increased by 86 millions sterling in the last thirty years, Mr. Asquith has laid down the sound economic principle that "so far from the 86 millions, at which Mr. Chamberlain shudders, representing a loss of 43 millions in wages to the British workmen (as asserted by Mr. Chamberlain) every halfpenny of it represents the payment for something which either British capital has invested, or which British workmen have expended their industry upon. If any other view were true, it would be difficult to understand how it is that, during the period Mr. Chamberlain selects of thirty years, pauperism has decreased from 4½ per cent. to 2½ per cent., while, if you take the five years ending 1897, and compare them with the five years ending 1902, you will find that the unemployed, so far as Trade Union returns go, have fallen from 5·4 to 3·3 per cent."

An excellent example of the way in which Mr. Asquith has repeatedly retorted with crushing effect on Mr. Chamberlain with that statesman's own selected weapon, is contained in the following extract from a speech delivered at Worcester on 9th November, 1903. Mr. Chamberlain had made a quotation from Montgredien's *History of the Free Trade Movement in England*, and Mr. Asquith welcomed

his reference to such an authority, and said : " I am going to read you a short passage from this work, to which Mr. Chamberlain appeals, which describes the condition of things that prevailed here in England and Scotland, not only in 1841, but in the years from 1841 to 1844, which immediately preceded the repeal of the Corn Laws. It says : 'Some of the details are quite appalling, and testify to an intensity and universality of destitution, starvation and misery to which no period of temporary distress since the adoption of Free Trade in England can show the slightest approach. In Leeds there were over 20,000 persons whose average earnings were under one shilling per week. In Nottingham 10,500 persons, nearly one-fifth of the population, were in receipt of parochial relief. In most of the leading trades of Birmingham the men were earning not one-half, and, in some cases, one-third of their usual wages, while some of the masters were so near ruin that they had on Saturday night to pawn their goods to pay their men's wages. In Manchester 12,000 females, after having pawned every article of furniture and of dress with which they could possibly dispense, were supported by voluntary charitable contributions. One-third of the population of Coventry was out of work.' I need not go on. Those are samples taken from all the leading industrial centres of the kingdom. That state of things prevailed in 1841. It went on in 1842-43 and 1844, without substantial modification or improvement, and Mr. Chamberlain, in order to make good his retrospective glorification of the happiness which we enjoyed under Protection, selects from this work of Mr. Montgredien a single passage isolated from the context, which describes the very brief improvement that took place in the early months of 1845."

In the same speech Mr. Asquith tabled five distinct cardinal propositions of Mr. Chamberlain's, each of which contains its own confutation :—

" (1) British trade is stagnant, and yet 1902 and 1903 threaten to be our record years.

" (2) A tax on food does not fall on the consumer, and

yet we dare not tax bacon and maize, because they are the food of the poorest of the community.

"(3) We must not tax raw material, and yet if we do not, some of our most important Colonial interests, like those of South Africa, will obtain no preference.

"(4) We are to put a 10 per cent. duty on imported manufactures, which is at the same time to bring us a revenue, on the assumption that foreign goods come in and pay the duty, and to secure additional employment for British labour, on the assumption that the same foreign goods do not come in at all.

"(5) Last and not least significant, Protection enables foreign countries to undersell us here by sweated labour; let us therefore, in order to improve the conditions of our own workmen, adopt the same system of Protection which makes that sweated labour possible."

To his repeated challenges to Mr. Chamberlain to answer the above contradictions Mr. Asquith has never received any answer, neither has he received any reply to the following questions, specifically put to Mr. Chamberlain on more than one occasion :—

To state what countries and what goods he considers we ought to retaliate upon.

To define what he means by raw materials and finished manufactures.

To state how it is possible to avoid taxing raw materials if he taxes finished manufactures, seeing that in this country, owing to its diversified industries, the raw material of one trade is the finished product of another.

To state why, if his proposed taxes upon bread, meat and dairy produce are to be paid by the foreigner, he specifically exempts maize and bacon.

To state why, if these new taxes do not fall on the consumer, he takes credit for the gain which he says will accrue to the consumer by his proposed removal of the taxes on sugar and tea.

To define and state in detail the "Colonial offer".

But the most impressive passages in Mr. Asquith's speeches are those in which he has solemnly warned his

countrymen that the adoption of Mr. Chamberlain's scheme would lead to the disruption of the Empire. The following are some extracts bearing on this subject :—

"Mr. Chamberlain says, and says truly, that the Colonies ought not to be treated as an appendage to Great Britain. I agree, and neither ought Great Britain to be treated as an appendage to the Colonies. After all—we must put in a word now and again for poor little England —after all, this United Kingdom still remains the greatest asset of the British Empire, with its forty-two millions of people, with its traditions of free government, with its indomitable enterprise, with its well-tried commercial and maritime prowess. Any one who strikes a blow at the root of the prosperity of the United Kingdom is doing the worst service which can be done to the Empire to which we are all proud to belong."

"Then I come to the other assumption, which is that unless we are prepared to establish a preferential tariff we must look for a break up of the Empire. That is a pure assumption that we are asked to accept and act upon without a shadow of proof or even a scintilla of evidence. For my part, I believe it to be—I use very plain language about it—I believe it to be a calumny on the Colonies and a slur on the Empire."

"No one has a higher and keener desire than I have to maintain and develop those friendly relations which of late years have so happily come into existence between the Colonies and ourselves, but let me point out that the Colonies have absolutely no grievance of any kind against us. We give them free admission through our open door into the largest and best market in the whole world. On the other hand, they have at home complete fiscal autonomy. For my part, I believe if they had not had it the Empire would not have kept together so long. They have complete fiscal autonomy, and in the exercise of that freedom the large majority of them have erected protective tariffs, not only against foreign nations, but also against the Mother Country. I do not complain of that for a moment. If you gave your Colonies freedom, as you

were right to do, you must allow them to exercise it in accordance with local sentiments and local opinion."

"Mr. Chamberlain's second proposal is still more strange. He says the Colonies are to be asked to agree not to start new industries in competition with ourselves. I think in the same speech it was that he told us that these great and growing countries will soon have 40,000,000 of white inhabitants; and they are actually to be asked to stereotype their industrial condition, to arrest their industrial development, in order that the Mother Country may keep and increase the hold she has on their markets. And that is the proposition seriously made in the name and in the interests of Imperial unity! I should like to know what Sir Wilfrid Laurier would say. He said the other day that he would sooner face the disruption of the Empire than that Canada should part with her fiscal independence. To my mind it is impossible to imagine a proposal seriously meant which would more certainly tend to engender friction, to foment quarrel and in the long run to kindle disloyalty."

The next extract is a masterly examination of the practicability of Mr. Chamberlain's proposals, showing the utter impossibility of putting them upon a workable basis. If on no other ground, on this alone Mr. Asquith's criticism is completely destructive of the whole of Mr. Chamberlain's plan.

"One final criticism I will make upon the scheme. How is it going to be set upon its legs and brought into practical action? Mr. Chamberlain told us at Tynemouth, and it is a most extraordinary process. First of all, there is to be a gigantic conference of all the trades of the United Kingdom. Capital and labour, masters' federations and workmen's unions, every rank and stage in the hierarchy of production, from the highest to the lowest—from coal and iron, cotton and wool, down to the makers of thimbles and the stuffers of dolls. They are all to come together through their chosen experts. Each is to urge the interests and claims of his own industry, to present the irreducible minimum of the preference which

it demands or will accept. Think of it! Think of the tumult of voices! Think of the jostling of interests! Think of the intriguing and the lobbying! Think of the irresistible temptation to enlist on the side of this or that industry every form of social or political influence! And out of all this tangle and rivalry, out of this confused competitive chaos, some serene and impartial power is to evolve a tariff which will satisfy everybody, which will disappoint nobody, and which will establish an even preference for all! But, gentlemen, that is only one side of the picture. Side by side with the Conference of Trade you must have a Congress of the Empire. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, the Crown Colonies, all must be represented. They in their turn, and from their separate points of view, are to elaborate a scheme which will reconcile the divergent and antagonistic interests of different parts of the Empire. They will not be content with the crude proposals of Glasgow. You will find, as I have proved more than once, what neither Mr. Chamberlain nor his followers have attempted to answer: you will find you cannot make an approach to an effective and equitable system of Preference unless you tax not only the food but the raw materials from foreign countries. Well, then, the results of these two confabulations are to be brought together for final harmony. What a vista of bickering and jealousy! And what a prospect for the future of mutual misunderstanding and endless series of demands for reconsideration and revision. And what is the *corpus vile* upon which this gigantic experiment in political vivisection is to be tried. It is not one but two of the most complex and delicate organisms in the world—British Trade and the British Empire. I venture to say to these rash practitioners, not only in your name, nor in the name of the Liberal party, but in the name of the country and the Empire, 'Hands off!'"

An admirable epitome of Mr. Asquith's views is contained in a communication which he contributed to a pamphlet entitled, "The Fiscal Puzzle," published at the end of 1903 by the proprietors of the *Dundee Advertiser.*

"The following points," wrote Mr. Asquith, "seem to me to be of special moment :—

"(1) There is no cause for alarm in an annual excess of imports over exports. The goods which come to us from abroad come in payment, not only for British goods exported, but for the services of British shipowners and seamen, and the interest on British savings invested in other countries.

"(2) Taxes on food are in the long run paid by the consumer. If an import duty is imposed, by way of preference or protection, on a part of our supply of food—for instance, on foreign as distinguished from colonial wheat—the price of the whole supply will rise to the same level as the price of the part which is taxed. In other words—in the case supposed—while the Exchequer would only receive the tax on the imports of foreign wheat, the consumer would be paying a higher price on all wheat, whether foreign, colonial, or home-grown.

"(3) It is essential to the maintenance of the prosperity of a manufacturing country like Great Britain that she should have an unrestricted influx of food and raw materials. The great bulk of our imports belongs to this class.

"(4) You cannot in the long run increase either the amount or the remuneration of employment by anything which raises the cost of living."

Mr. Asquith has not, however, made the mistake of saying that all is well with Britain's affairs, and it is a gross misrepresentation on the part of his opponents to say that this is his position. On the contrary, he has again and again insisted on Liberals emphasising their alternative policy. One extract from his speech at Cinderford will suffice :—

"Do not however let it be supposed that because we are driven to defend the citadel of Free Trade we therefore think that all is for the best and are content with a policy of folded hands. That there are disquieting features in our industrial as in our social conditions no honest observer, certainly no member of the party of progress, will

be found to deny. We have seen industries in which we ought to have maintained our supremacy falling behind, and in some cases entirely taken away from us by our competitors. Defective knowledge, inferior processes, lack of flexibility or versatility, a stubborn industrial conservatism, these are the real enemies of British trade, and have done us infinitely more harm than all the tariffs and all the dumping syndicates that were ever created. Better education, better training, better methods, a larger outlook, these are our primary needs, and it says little for our political sagacity that we should allow our minds to be diverted from them by quarrels as to the quantum of dogmatic theology that is to be administered to little children, or by attempts to revive the buried fallacies of Protection. True it is also that in spite of the continuous growth of our national prosperity, we still have with us the unemployed, the ill-fed, the aged poor; but here, again, let us look to natural and not to artificial remedies. Instead of raising the price of bread let us try to raise the standard of life Temperance, better housing, the tenure and taxation of land, these are matters as to which we have allowed our legislation to fall deplorably into arrear. To take up the task in a spirit of faith and of resolute purpose is, I hope and believe, the mission of the Liberal party in a Liberal Parliament."

In connection with the above quotation, there should be read Mr. Asquith's speech in Parliament on 16th February, 1904, in which he showed the hollow absurdity of Mr. Chamberlain's jeremiads by reading a speech made by him on 6th January, 1902. In this speech Mr. Chamberlain said that "there were no signs of imminent or pressing danger to the country". He declared that during the last five years we had enjoyed "absolutely unparalleled" conditions of trade; he added that though there had been a little temporary depression "the prospects were extremely good," and he was "not at all disposed to take a pessimistic view". As for Mr. Chamberlain's remedies, he suggested precisely those advocated by Mr. Asquith, and since ridiculed by the Protectionist leader—more brains

in employers, up-to-date methods, scientific intelligence. "If these conditions be fulfilled," concluded the Mr. Chamberlain of 1902, "I have no fear for the future." "Did not such a speech," said Mr. Asquith, with a contemptuous gesture, "turn the whole tariff movement into a farce?"

Mr. Asquith has fully recognised, and has specially emphasised in his speeches the necessity of all the Free Trade forces uniting in a common opposition to Mr. Chamberlain's proposals. He has again and again urged the Liberal party to give every possible consideration to Free Trade Unionists, and to facilitate co-operation with them. He was present at a very influential meeting of Free Traders of all parties held at Devonshire House on 17th May, 1904, presided over by the Duke of Devonshire. In surveying that brilliant assembly containing the flower of promising Unionism, one could see how entirely Mr. Chamberlain had miscalculated his chances. In the course of his speech, Mr. Asquith said that in spite of obvious difficulties to which the Duke had alluded, he thought a concentration of all Free Traders into a distinct and definite organisation was quite practicable and ought to be immediately undertaken. Looking back on the struggle for the last twelve months, Mr. Asquith said that they had every reason for satisfaction in the results of the bye-elections and in the position of their cause. Mr. Chamberlain's enterprise, he said, had been engineered and better advertised than any other adventure of the kind in recent years. "It was quite true," he remarked with dry humour, "that one or two things were wanting—simple things, commonplace things: a little logic, a little arithmetic, and a little history, but if the doctrine failed, as he believed up to the present it had, it was because it had to encounter and overcome one of the most formidable and insurmountable ramparts in the whole world—the common sense of the British people."

## CHAPTER XXI

### PARTY LEADER

NO one will question that Mr. Asquith has proved himself a great party leader as well as a loyal colleague. In this chapter we purpose briefly reviewing his splendid services to Liberalism, and commenting on the plentiful evidence he has shown of his qualifications for the highest position in its ranks.

One distinguishing feature of Mr. Asquith's career as a party man has been the political insight he has shown in emphasising and concentrating on the strong points of his own policy, and detecting and exposing the weak places of his opponents. All his attempts at legislation have been on subjects that his opponents have had a difficulty in resisting confidently and unitedly, while at the same time they have received the enthusiastic support of the whole of the Liberal party both in Parliament and in the country. While he was at the Home Office, the approval of his policy and administration by his supporters was repeatedly endorsed and confirmed, in a modified form, by at least some important section of his opponents. During the short Liberal Ministry of 1892-95, he was recognised by the Tory party, next to Mr. Gladstone, as their most formidable opponent, and as the Minister who, by his practical commonsense administration, had gained the confidence of his countrymen, and was proving the best recruiting agent for his party. The admiration and dread in which Mr. Asquith was held by the Conservative party are the best proof of the powerful position he had gained.

In Parliament Mr. Asquith was, next to his great leader, more feared than any other Liberal debater, and it is questionable whether he was not then regarded, as he is now, as the most damaging critic of Tory policy. Mr. Balfour's admiration of Mr. Asquith, both as an orator and as a debater, is well known, and he is reported to have said that he would rather be followed in debate by any other speaker in Parliament than by Mr. Asquith. The secret of much of Mr. Asquith's success lies in the thoroughness with which he gets up his case, and the completeness of his knowledge about the subject he takes in hand. There is no sign of slipshod preparation about his speeches, and he never speaks publicly on any question about which he is not well informed. No public man can claim a higher reputation for accuracy of statement than can Mr. Asquith, while at the same time, no politician is fairer to his political opponents.

He possesses an admirable parliamentary manner, his debating talents being peculiarly suited to an intellectual audience. He is never flurried, has complete control over his emotions, and is never provoked into making scenes. His oratory is not of the rousing, exciting type; if anything, it suffers from being too hard, passionless and unemotional, though the House of Commons has not in recent sessions shown itself fond of a too fervid style of speaking, and it is distinctly averse to anything in the nature of ranting. At the same time, all competent parliamentary observers agree in their criticisms that Mr. Asquith's delivery lacks warmth, and that it would be far more effective were it more alive, vivid and inspiring.

But it is not denied that he has, to use Mr. T. P. O'Connor's words regarding him, "the true oratorical gift". Nature has given him a voice of admirable compass and abundant power, a mobile actor's face, and the gift of arranging and dramatising simple thought which is the peculiar spell of oratory. His manner and bearing too are pervaded with that spirit of high culture which irresistibly charms and fascinates an audience. He is fond of Latinised speech and sonorous phrases. Some of his sent-

ences are long, but they are beautifully balanced, and have the majestic rhythm and natural cadence of the born orator. There is a grace and strength about his oratory of which one never tires, and it has the great advantage over passionate rhetoric that it does not blurr and hide, but illumines and interprets the thought it embodies.

As a debater, Mr. Asquith is gifted in an exceptional degree. He combines the potent force of culture with surpassing lucidity of intellect, and he has a perfect genius for luminous exposition and cogent reasoning. He is a master of orderly statement and incisive criticism, singularly happy in discovering the weak points in his opponent's case and the strong points in his own, and singularly able in presenting them in their most effective form. He has too a formidable power of biting ridicule and crushing retort, and he is always alert, cool and perfectly self-possessed.

Despite his cold exterior and his calm methodical method of exposition, he has a remarkable capacity for thoroughly gripping the attention of his hearers, of making them intensely interested, of associating them as it were in the process of his reasoning, and of completely satisfying his supporters and unsettling and confounding his opponents. His speeches, though never fiery and sensational, always leave their impress on the minds of his audience. The fruit of his oratory is deep reflection, not transient excitement. He occasionally indulges in humour, and when he does, it is extremely effective, somewhat dry and grim, but very good and to the point. He has, however, a great talent for humorous satire, and in the paraphrasing or apt quotation of an opponent's speech, he is unrivalled.

He has the superlative virtue of never being guilty of verbosity. The concise nature of his parliamentary method has even excited the admiration of those zealots for brevity, the representatives of the press. Above all, Mr. Asquith has the faculty of delivering a prepared speech with all the freshness and freedom of an impromptu oration, and the ability to suit himself to his

audience and add to his material apposite criticisms and arguments suggested by the occasion. This is supplemented by the capacity, indispensable for a successful debater, of speaking confidently and powerfully when called on unexpectedly, and of dealing coolly and effectively with all kinds of interruptions.

As a platform speaker Mr. Asquith is not seen to such advantage as he is in Parliament. He lacks that capacity to let himself go, to embody the feelings of his audience in inspiring and enthusing speech, to rouse their energies and fire their sympathies. His manner is too staid and unemotional to awaken great passion in his audience, and he disdains to employ the method of, to use a colloquial phrase, "playing to the gallery," which popular audiences in this country expect, and are treated to by many eminent politicians. It is not that Mr. Asquith has been denied the genius of penetrating and interpreting the social and political aspirations of his countrymen. No one who carefully reads his speeches can question his conspicuous gifts in this direction. But he has apparently not been endowed with, and he has not acquired, a style of oratory calculated to stimulate vast masses of people, by passionate appeals to their emotions, to wild demonstrations of enthusiasm for causes of which before they were only tepid supporters.

But there remains to him a great and most potent advantage, denied to more fervid orators, which accounts for the exceptional demand in which he finds himself as a public speaker. His speeches, being addressed rather to the intellects than to the emotions of his hearers, and being delivered in calm, reasoning but withal melodious tones, have a more lasting effect. He concentrates the attention of his listeners on the fundamental truths he desires to propagate and the fatal errors he wishes to expose. There are no irrelevant digressions of passionate claptrap; the object he has in view is to give his audience a sense of co-operation, so that he and they shall reason out together the problems before them. To this end he uses language of the utmost clearness, and he adopts the manner and

style of speaking which he believes are likely to enable his hearers to follow him most intently and with the least distraction. And probably there is no politician of the day who leaves a deeper impress on, and brings home greater conviction to, the minds of thinking people than does Mr. Asquith.

As a public speaker Mr. Asquith has rendered incalculable service to the Liberal party. He has always been ready and willing to bear more than his share of work in educating and convincing the country when issues of vital importance have been at stake. As one of the most admired and popular of Liberal statesmen, a keen fighter and a courageous leader, with decided convictions and a command of incisive language, he was deluged during the Home Rule Ministry with appeals to address public meetings. Notwithstanding the arduous nature of his administrative duties, he found it possible to respond favourably to a large number of the invitations pressed upon him, and both surprised and gratified his party by the number and ability of his speeches. During the ever-darkening days of the Home Rule Ministry, and through all the harassing and disquieting episodes that crowded its career, he held his courage high and his faith undimmed, and never failed at all times to present a bold front to the enemy. With the single-minded purpose of serving his country and his party, he entered into the thickest of the fray, as a leader should, and set an example of courage and energy to the rank and file of his party, though he never sought to instil false hopes or belittle the difficulties of the task before them.

A typical illustration of his stirring appeals is to be found in a speech he delivered at the Eighty Club on 6th December, 1893, when the party had been shaken by the failure to carry Home Rule into law, and the powerful attack of the Unionist forces was bearing manifest fruit in the evident signs of diminishing confidence in the country. "I believe," he said, "that in the situation in which we find ourselves the great motto which the Liberal party ought to adopt is the motto of thoroughness, of boldness, of confi-

dence and of courage. We are confronted by an unparalleled combination of forces and of influences. We have to deal not only with our hereditary and traditional foes, but we have to make our account with a more insidious and perhaps in some respects a more dangerous and formidable opposition on the part of those who only a few years ago were our most trusted friends and allies."

Again, on the resignation of Mr. Gladstone, he exhorted the party to greater effort. On 4th April, 1894, after referring to the loss of their matchless leader as a "calamity of which they were acutely and growingly sensible," he continued: "Although we cannot but feel that we carry on our work with impaired and with mutilated resources, yet we should not be honouring, we should be betraying the obligation which his illustrious example and his lifelong services have imposed upon us if we were not to strain every faculty and to exhaust the utmost possibilities on every opportunity in prosecuting the work which we began under his auspices, and the completion of which he has consigned to our care." Mr. Asquith then proceeded to urge the necessity of a devoted loyalty to their new leader, Lord Rosebery, and he severely condemned and ridiculed the attempted agitation against him.

The danger of disunion and disaffection, and the consequent slackening of effort and enthusiasm, was clearly recognised from the beginning by Mr. Asquith, as one that seriously menaced the stability and life of the Home Rule Ministry, and threatened to sap the vitality and force of the party throughout the country. He set himself at all times to impress upon Liberals the vital necessity of absolute unity. He was not blind himself to the fact, and he did not seek to hide it from the party, that the supporters of the Government were composed of different sections, each strenuously determined to advance its claims. In November, 1892, in a fine fighting speech at the City Liberal Club, he said that he believed his audience would feel that, in the presence of a compact and formidable enemy, it was the duty of the Liberal party to stand shoulder to shoulder. Co-operation, if it was to be fruit-

ful and effective, could not be carried on in politics more than in any other sphere of life except by a large sacrifice of individual preferences and individual prejudices. He warned them that unless Liberals were prepared to recognise and act upon this truth, they would find that their majority would dwindle away, and he urged them to press forward as a disciplined and united force.

He made more than one urgent appeal to the Liberal and Labour forces to close their ranks, and pointed out the utter folly of their injuring each other for the benefit of the opponents of both. Speaking in April, 1894, at Huddersfield, a constituency which had been lost to the Liberals through this fatuous policy, he said that the Liberal party contained some who were in front of the average opinion of the party and some who were behind. But there was much more difference between the hindmost Liberal and the foremost Tory than there was between the foremost and hindmost Liberal, and the only result of dissension was to give to their common enemy constituencies which would otherwise be represented in Parliament by a supporter of the cause of progress.

"I have spoken plainly," he said, "and I feel I am the more able to do so because I am not one of those who are blind to the new forces which are at work within the Liberal party, or, I think, one of those who are out of sympathy with the new ideals which are stimulating men's minds and imaginations." He was not, he continued, insensible to the drawbacks and dangers of the party system, and he recognised to the full that it sometimes had an injurious effect in restraining originality and in exaggerating opinions not perhaps strongly or definitely held. He admitted, too, that party loyalty was often injurious in inducing men to some extent to sacrifice to the perfection of the machine the quality and purposes of the work which the machine was intended to perform. He was not therefore in any sense a blind idolater of the system, but he infinitely preferred the system of government by party, to the system of government by groups, and he enforced his argument

by instancing the condition of affairs in the French Chambers.

On 25th October, 1894, he dealt in the frankest fashion with the projected formation of an Independent Labour party. After referring to the changes of the last few years he said: "The middle class is no longer supreme. The working classes have received from Parliament not a complete, but a large measure of political enfranchisement, and they are now, if they choose to exercise their power, dominant at the polls and in the House of Commons. What is the result? In the first place, we see on every hand signs of ambition on the part of the working classes to make labour an articulate and independent political force, and, in the next place, we see an equally marked and growing disposition on their part to use their political power and the machinery of the State as an instrument for bettering their own industrial and material condition. . . . What ought to be our attitude to this movement? I am one of those who think we need not regard it with alarm, and we are certainly not justified in looking at it with affected indifference and contempt. In my opinion we ought, if we can, to try to understand this question, and so far as lies in our power, we ought to attempt to deal in a spirit of large statesmanship with the conditions which have made these new developments possible." Regarding the proposed Independent Labour party, he said those who were invited to join it ought to make sure, firstly, that no existing political organisation was or could be made an intelligent instrument for carrying out the reasonable demands of the labouring class, and, secondly, that the new party would be powerful enough to effect the object it had in view. He saw no prospect of such a future for the new movement, and he said that the only result would be to divide the forces of Liberalism; sacrifice constituencies to the Tories and thus strengthen the party of reaction; and eventually lead to the creation of the disastrous system of government by groups.

The great movement for labour representation has made considerable progress since the speech just quoted was made, and happily there is reason for believing that its leaders are

now more inclined to listen to counsels of reason than they have been in the past. It is to be hoped that the extremists will be firmly held back, and that by a mutual forbearance and a generous tolerance it will be found possible for Labour and Liberalism to unite as a solid power against privilege and reaction. Certain it is that no statesman is more anxious to achieve such a result, and will lend a more sympathetic ear to all reasonable proposals to forward such an end, than Mr. Asquith, who, when Home Secretary, proved himself one of the greatest friends to genuine social reform that Labour has ever known.

Of Mr. Asquith's great services to his party during the long period of opposition which has unfortunately been its lot, we need not speak here, as they are to be found in other chapters. It is sufficient to say, he has shown in these later years that his devotion to Liberalism is as true and intense as ever it was, that his vigour and energy have not diminished but increased, that his conspicuous intellectual abilities and his powers of sound judgment have been developed and enriched, and that he still takes that broad, tolerant, statesmanlike view of affairs which has distinguished the whole of his political career.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE FUTURE

WHAT is the cry that Liberals from every part of the country are sending forth to-day? What is the lack that in all directions they themselves tell you is taking the edge off their enthusiasm and their fighting spirit? The cry is for a leader and a policy. Then what are the qualifications most desirable in a leader of the Liberal party at the present juncture, having regard to past and present facts and the future possibilities of the political situation?

The first and foremost qualification of a Liberal leader is that he should be a true Liberal, with the essence of the thing in him, and animated not merely by the principles but by the ideals of Liberalism. A man of deep human sympathies, with a record of service to humanity. Secondly, he should be a man commanding in a large degree the respect and confidence of all sections of the party, a man of great tolerance, free from rankling personalities.

His outstanding personal qualities should be fearlessness and steadfastness. Fearless in that he will unflinchingly go forward on an undeviating path to all the lengths which true Liberalism demands. Fearless also in that he will strenuously oppose everything that is politically evil, reactionary and retrograde, however powerful or popular it may be. Steadfast he must be in that his policy shall be the policy of the party as a whole; in that he will deal justly with all the necessarily diverse claims of his followers and will not be intimidated by

any section; in that he will be unshakable in his faith, proof against panic, but not slow to appreciate new forces and not blindly condemning everything his opponents propose simply because it is they who propose it.

The next essential is that he shall be a man whose most eminent qualities are of a practical character—a man of great practical genius, an *actual* reformer. At the same time he must be endowed with those high intellectual gifts necessary to a political leader. He should, if possible, be the ablest debater in his party.

And last, but not least, he should be an eminently "safe" man—safe if possible in the eyes of all adherents of the Liberal creed, and safe also in the judgment of the great non-party masses of the electorate, who form the ballast of our political system. He should be safe first on national and imperial issues. This is vital and imperative. It is no use Liberals shutting their eyes to the fact that the vulnerable point in their position to-day is the uneasiness of the country regarding their foreign and colonial policy. The measure of the Tory reaction and of Mr. Chamberlain's jingoism during the last few years, is the measure of the extent to which moderate minded and patriotic men have lost confidence in the foreign and colonial policy of the Liberal party. The election of a leader whose record arouses fears on this ground will be a fatal mistake. It is the greatest danger that threatens not only the Liberal party but our country and our Empire, for it will mean a great backwash of spurious imperialism leading straight to Protection. The one and only effective bulwark against this appalling calamity is a Liberal leader and a Liberal policy commanding the confidence of the country at large on national and imperial grounds.

The next Liberal leader should be "safe," too, in that he will use his influence in all directions on the side of moderation and commonsense; that both his foreign and colonial and domestic policy shall be free from sensationalism, and enable the country to feel that it can go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning

without the overshadowing fear of some "blazing indiscretion" being committed. The nation wants none of the "long spoon" and "mend your manners" antics that have distinguished the "new diplomacy". And in domestic affairs it wants no sudden revolutionary changes, but it is ripe for great and effective measures of sane social reform, far different from the "reforms" of the so-called Tory Democrats.

The foregoing forms a fairly formidable catalogue of virtues; but the test they constitute has nothing superhuman or unreasonable about it. Does Mr. Asquith satisfy it? We ask Liberals to give a minute and careful consideration to his character, his qualities and his record, to free their minds from all bias either for him or against him on account of his attitude on the war, and we think the answer will be a decided affirmative, and the deeper their knowledge and the keener their scrutiny, the more decided the affirmative will become.

Mr. Asquith stands out to-day among Liberal statesmen as the one man who unites more than any other all sections of the Liberal party. He also enjoys the great advantage of possessing in a very large degree the confidence of the general body of the electorate irrespective of party. The confidence of a nation is a thing of slow growth and very difficult of attainment; but Mr. Asquith has gained it by the sound, practical, common-sense spirit with which he has always considered and discussed political affairs. No statesman of our time of any party has brought a more practical and logical mind to the investigation and examination of political problems than has Mr. Asquith, and no living Liberal statesman has rendered greater services to his party, or has such a record of achieved social reform as he, the greatest Home Secretary of modern times.

Mr. Asquith's Liberalism embodies in a remarkable degree all the varied essentials that go to make up the faith of the true reformer. From the time he entered Parliament he has been a thorough, genuine, all-round Liberal, and a formidable fighter in the cause of progress.

Both in Parliament and in the country, he voices the unspoken thought of his party, and presents its case with unrivalled ability and power. When Mr. Asquith rises to speak there is no uneasy dread of weak concessions and indiscreet declarations giving an advantage to his opponents. Liberals have a full confidence that the policy of the party will be wisely and ably expounded, and that no weakness of their opponents will be left unexposed and unemphasised. No one questions his position to-day as the ablest debater in the Liberal party, and it is universally acknowledged that he has proved himself the most deadly and effective antagonist Mr. Chamberlain has had since the retirement and death of Mr. Gladstone. History will record, and Liberals will remember with gratitude, that it is his sane patriotism that has proved the best antidote to, and has delivered the country from, the fever of Mr. Chamberlain's raging jingoism and sordid imperialism. It is patent to all men that Mr. Chamberlain's pernicious policy is abating everywhere before the advance of the Liberal alternative which Mr. Asquith has done so much to promote.

Let it be admitted at once that one great qualification is missing in the equipment of Mr. Asquith as an ideal political leader. He does not appear to have that magnetic personality, that power of striking the popular imagination, possessed in an eminent degree by Mr. Gladstone and to a lesser extent by Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Rosebery. But is this vital and essential? Is it the most desirable attribute in a Liberal leader at the present time? Is meteoric brilliancy the quality suited to deal with the present situation of the Liberal party and the problems that face it? Is it not rather the safe man that is wanted —the man of sagacious judgment and strong will; the able and progressive thinker of enlightened mind; the fearless man of action and the genuine reformer?

We agree that a man of magnetic personality if endowed with these other qualities is preferable to a man without great magnetic force. But is there such a man at the command of the Liberal party? And further, is it certain that Mr. Asquith has yet disclosed the full force of

his personal genius? All close observers agree that there environs him even in his greatest and most brilliant efforts, when his nature seems to widen and open itself more fully than usual, a sense of reserve strength, of unused power, waiting to be forced out by some great crisis or responsibility. He gives the impression—an impression, however, which is altogether misleading and has led many to misapprehend his character—that it is he that masters his subject, not his subject that masters him. There seems to rest on his nature a repressive power that paralyses the expression of his passion. But there are occasions when the Arctic grip seems to relax, when the dynamic forces reveal themselves, as nature reveals itself on a mild day in the midst of winter. In those moments, when his inner self is exposed, Mr. Asquith shows his truest and deepest spirit. It is these openings of the soul that reveal the real man, and it is to them that we direct the attention of those who desire to get an accurate conception of Mr. Asquith's character.

These signs, however, are hopeful, and we have confidence that the hour and the event will liberate the passion that will fulfil Mr. Asquith's destiny. At the appointed time, the bonds will burst and the hidden fires will flash forth. When that time comes, the Liberal party will have a leader who will be a second Gladstone. That this is not mere speculative rhetoric we leave to the judgment of the careful student of Mr. Asquith's character and record.

Passing from men to measures, what is the prospective policy of the Liberal party? Mr. Asquith has stated it in the clearest terms both in general and in detail. First he declares for a firm foreign and a sympathetic colonial policy, commanding the support of all patriotic men irrespective of party. Then he has emphatically declared for a policy of, to use his own words, "fairness, consideration, and above all, of freedom in South Africa". Connected with all this there is the great question of the national expenditure. While he has uncompromisingly declared for the maintenance of a strong and efficient Navy, Mr.

Asquith is strongly in favour of drastic reductions in our expenditure in other directions and especially in regard to the Army.

Turning to purely domestic affairs, he is pledged to immediate action in regard to education. On 9th October, 1903, in reply to some criticisms, he said: "I desire to take this opportunity of speaking the opinion of all the leaders of the Liberal party, that this matter of education is one which will not be allowed to pass out of sight, or to be superseded by any other matter. This is not only a Nonconformist's question; it is a citizen's question. The Act in its present form outrages the feelings of one-half of the people of this country, and it will be our first duty to see that our educational system is brought into conformity with justice and the principle of popular control."

The following explicit declaration, which was made to his constituents on 19th October, 1903, shows the spirit in which he is prepared to deal with the other great leading issues of the hour—the reform of licensing and intemperance, the housing question, and the problems of the tenure and taxation of land.

He said: Let them not ignore the black spots that existed on their social and economic map. What was the greatest and most prominently operating of these causes in the mischief and misery which many people suffered? He had no hesitation in saying it was the drink evil. One hundred and fifty millions sterling was a minimum estimate of the drink bill of this country. When they had people thinking about depressed trade he would ask them to think what the difference would be in the wealth of the community if even a substantial fraction of that £150,000,000 were applied in remunerative employment? Half the pauperism and more than half the crime of the community would disappear at once, and with that two of the heaviest burdens which hung on its shoulders and prevented its progress. Now was it not from the lowest and most material point of view their duty to take some very serious step when they had the opportunity to diminish

the incentives to intemperance? Another thing which had a great deal to do with the depressed condition of considerable sections of the community was the houses in which they lived, and allied to this was a much larger question, the fringe of which would never be touched so long as the Tory party remained as they were there on the land. The question of land tenure, the question of the acquisition of land for public purposes, and, above all, the taxation of land values—the housing question involved all these, and there would never be a real solution of the difficulties which everybody admitted were patent and undeniable—the difficulties of this question of housing—until they had got a Government and a Parliament strong and resolute enough to take hold of the land question and deal with it on fundamental principles.

His views on Labour questions are summarised in this volume, and no Labour leader or any sympathiser with Labour, who will consider in a fair spirit Mr. Asquith's services to the working classes when he was Home Secretary, his advocacy at all times of their reasonable grievances, and the special support he has given to their just claims for the resumption of the legal power of free combination, can fail to recognise that they have no truer and more powerful friend than Mr. Asquith, and that there is no statesman to whom their interests can be more safely entrusted, and who is more worthy of their support. He represents what is essentially a working-class constituency, and there is no section of his supporters who have greater faith and confidence in him than the miners and those engaged in manual labour.

Mr. Asquith has admirably stated the general policy of the Liberal party. "Above all," he said on one occasion, "we want the substitution of insight and foresight, of prudence and economy, for waste, for rashness, for blundering, in the framing and conduct of our national policy. We want a change both in spirit and in method, both of measures and of men." And in another speech he said: "It is the business of Englishmen to make England worth living in as well as worth dying for. It is both a higher

and a harder task to make than to take a city. Patriotism like charity begins at home."

Mr. Asquith has made some of the finest and noblest expositions of true Liberalism that have ever been uttered by any statesman. On 20th January, 1893, he made a speech which is so very appropriate to the present time, that we cannot better conclude this character sketch of him than by quoting it. He was addressing a meeting of the National Liberal Federation, and in a peroration of splendid eloquence and power, he held up to the assembled political workers the nobility and magnificence of the task before them, and urged them to rise to the height of their high duty. No man who was merely a cold reasoner, without imaginative insight and living sympathy, could deliver such an appeal as the following to the loftiest sentiments of the human soul.

"Never in our history," he said, "had the State more urgent need to be better equipped, for never have darker or graver problems concerned our statesmen. A hundred years ago, the greatest of our political writers composed his immortal epitaph upon the age of chivalry—an age of chivalry which we could not if we would, and would not if we could, recall—days when the common people formed the dim and unregarded background for the prowess and the pleasure of the few. With the widening horizon of interests and opportunities there is an ever-enlarging field for a noble spirit of adventure. Behind and beneath the surface of Society there are sights terrible, appalling and yet inspiring for those who have eyes to see. The labourer tills the fields, which are not his own, season after season with patient industry, with no hope for his old age beyond the precarious bounty of public or private charity. The worker, old before her time, lives a life worse than that of a mediæval serf in the squalor of the sweater's den. The little child cowers in the cold and the darkness while it listens in terror for the unsteady step which is to it the signal of its parent's homecoming. These surely are figures, if we could only recognise it, more appalling to the imagination and more stirring to the sense of wrong

than any vision that ever inspired crusader or knight errant. While these things remain there is work to be done, there are spurs to be won by every soldier who is enlisted in the army of progress, and you and I who have taken service in its ranks renew our fealty to-night to the great cause, of which justice is the end and freedom the instrument, and with whose fortunes are bound up the best hopes for the future of our country."

# APPENDIX

## MR. ASQUITH'S ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

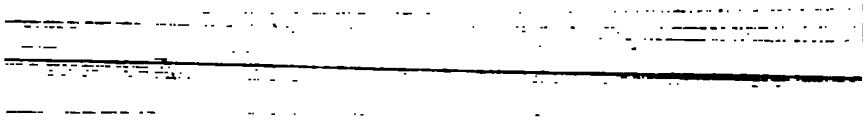
Nov., 1892. Issued drastic orders to deal with sweating and excessive child labour.

Jan., 1893. Increased staff of male inspectors.
Organised a new class, and decentralised system, of male inspection.
Inaugurated system of women inspectors.

Oct., 1893. Instituted searching inquiry by experts into dangerous trades—pottery trade, manufacture of chemicals, manufacture of white lead, industry of quarrying and Belfast linen industry. Eventually issued new set of rules, safeguarding the health and comfort of the workers in these industries.

## MR. ASQUITH'S LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL REFORM

| | |
|---|---|
| Employers' Liability Bill. | Second reading moved 20th Feb., 1893. |
| | Third reading carried without a division. |
| | Dropped 20th Feb., 1894, owing to disagreement with Lords' amendments. |
| Factories and Workshops Acts. | Introduced 1st March, 1895. |
| | Third reading carried without a division. |
| | Passed into law 6th July, 1895. |
| Bill to amend the Truck Acts. | Introduced 2nd March, 1895. |
| | Dropped owing to defeat of Liberal Government. |
| | Similar measure eventually carried into law by succeeding Government. |



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